

# **Focalization Schemas, Transnational Formations and Social Remittance in the Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

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## **Declaration**

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## **Dedication**

In fond memory of my father, undocumented philosopher, Joseph Maritim Arap Soo.

For my mother, Mary, for her matchless patience.

\*

And for our children, in anticipation of the border(lessnes)s of their age.

## Abstract

This work contextualises Chimamanda Adichie's novels and collected short stories within the area of migrant transnationalism, arguing that this is an inherent feature of the content and form of the texts. Adichie's narrative are pre-occupied with motif of migration that, in the contemporary context, is characterised by what David Harvey terms time-space compression. This has facilitated spatio-temporal disjunctures as a result of migrants' simultaneous embeddedness in multiple cross-border localities. This work therefore contributes to the burgeoning research on transnationalism but gives it a literary dimension by narratologically exploring how border-crossing narratives which trace experiences of migrants and non-migrants, implicate transformations in worldviews of individual migrants and how these idiosyncratic transformations have far-reaching collective implications in their points of origin. This is operationalised through analytic mining of how the presented non-migrants' and migrants' encounters are focalised in the narratives at the points where they emigrate, where they immigrate as well as the emergent in-between spaces they inhabit as transnational persons. In tandem with seizing upon how these encounters are focalized, the postcolonial notion of liminality is adopted to account for the processes by which the characters in these transnational locations generate various agentic capacities that are trafficked to their countries of origin as social remittance. Towards this end, it reasons that, with the transnational space conceived of as a liminal space rife with possibilities for socio-politically innovating, migrant characters are veritable agents of socio-political transformation in the communities where they originate and to which they are still emotively attached and committed. Despite this optimism in approach to their transformative function, however, the less salutary implications of their transnational locations are considered.

## Opsomming

Hierdie studie kontekstualiseer Chimamanda Adichie se romans, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2005), *Americanah* (2013) en geselekteerde kortverhale uit *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), binne die omgewing van migrerende transnasionale en argumenteer dat dit 'n inherente kenmerk van die inhoud en vorm van die tekste is. Adichie se narratiewe word in beslag geneem deur die migrasie-motief wat in die hedendaagse konteks, gekenmerk deur wat David Harvey tyd-ruimte-kompressie noem, ruimtelik-temporale disjunkte vergemaklik vanweë migrante se gelyktydige ingebedheid in veelvuldige oorgrens-lokaliteite. Hierdie navorsing gebruik 'n narratologiese lens om ondersoek in te stel na hoe grensoorstekende narratiewe, wat die ervarings van migrante en niemigrante naspeur, transformasies in die wêreldbeskouings van individuele migrante beïnvloed, en hoe hierdie idiosinkratiese transformasies verreikende kollektiewe gevolge by hul oorsprongplekke het. Dit geskied deur 'n ontleding van hoe niemigrante en migrante se ervarings in die narratiewe by die emigrasiepunte gefokaliseer word, waar hulle immigrer, sowel as die opkomende tussenruimtes wat hulle as transnasionale persone bewoon. Tesame met die ondersoek na hoe hierdie ontmoetings gefokaliseer word, word die postkoloniale begrip liminaliteit aangewend om rekenskap te gee van die prosesse waardeur die karakters in hierdie transnasionale lokaliteite verskeie agentkapasiteite genereer, wat as maatskaplike oordragte na hul herkomslande verplaas word. Met die oog hierop word daar geredeneer dat, waar die transnasionale ruimte as 'n liminale ruimte met volop moontlikhede vir sosiopolitieke innovasie voorgestel word, migrerende karakters ware agente is van sosiopolitieke transformasie in die gemeenskappe waar hulle ontstaan en waaraan hulle steeds emosioneel geheg en toegewy is. Ten spyte van hierdie optimisme in die benadering tot hul transformerende funksie, word daar oorweging aan die minder heilsame implikasies van hul transnasionale lokaliteite geskenk.

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## Chapter One: Contexts and Concepts

### Introduction

This dissertation brings to focus the works of the Nigerian novelist, short story writer and essayist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Since her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003, she has so far written two more novels, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2005) and *Americanah* (2013), and a collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, which was published in 2009. This task sets out to interrogate these works' transnational locations and the complex societal corollaries that this transnationalism implicates for the depicted migrant characters' ideological bearing, on one hand, and for their original homeland's socio-ideological configuration. By highlighting the texts' transnationalisms and the societal problematics they raise, it seeks to articulate processes by which projected characters navigate alien social contexts. In turn, by pointing towards processes of navigating such inimical cross-border contexts, with the task being the illumination of the vital socio-ideological ingredients that re-shape their outlook and which subsequently condition their destabilising return migration to their natal homeland of Nigeria. This articulation highlights that despite the unsettling experiences, the border-crossing characters nonetheless acquire or generate agency that in transnational ecology as they are situated, become forms and contents transferred to Nigeria as social remittance. For this exercise, five theoretical standpoints are interwoven, namely Postcolonialism (specifically Homi Bhabha's and Nibert Bugeja's theorizations of liminality), Critical Race Theory (henceforth simply CRT), narratology (particularly the concept of focalization), theories of transnationalism and the allied perspective of social remittance.

In terms of the thematic and stylistic character of her literary engagements, critics have often tagged Adichie under third generation of writers within the Nigerian literary production, whose one identifying element is the motif of migration that features in their works (see for example Adesanmi and Dunton 10–11; Adéèkó 12). Each of her works features a cross-border motif most notably the back-and-forth mobility across national borders and family life and patterns that traverse such national borders. *Purple Hibiscus* sets precedence in her oeuvre by highlighting social and political forces that hound the characters within Nigeria, and presents migration as an attractive option in the face of these debilitating forces. Later works (namely *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the short stories and *Americanah*) give more intricate treatments to this border traversal motif. *Americanah* presents a treatment of a complete cycle of migration (departure, arrival and settlement, then return and re-integration in the homeland) all in one

narrative entity, indicating Adichie's mustering of the poetics of migration and transnationalism (considering that this novel is her latest in her oeuvre as it stands). The narrative in *Half of a Yellow Sun* proceeds from the premises of return migration, while each of the short stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* rivets attention on a detail related to migration and transnationalism.

As an entry point for the exploration these variables and processes, a profile of each will make clear how they intersect in a way that justifies two premises that undergird the principle arguments in the dissertation. The first of these premises is that the inimical conditions in the migrating protagonists' homeland (Nigeria) vis-à-vis those in host country (America) conduce for the protagonists' adaptation to an in-between transnational location. Secondly, the transnational location in turn presents as an ideological limen from where insurgent practices and ideas are launched by these dislocated protagonists.

Transnationalisms<sup>1</sup> emerge from post-1990s migration studies which have re-oriented research on non-state individual's activities and undertakings that traverse national boundaries (Portes et al. 219; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1–2; Ozkul 2; Vertovec, *Transnationalism* 3; Levitt and Jaworsky 129–31). The emergence of transnational turn in migration research during this period incidentally caps a period in the Global South marked by political and economic crises that acted as fodder for migration aspirations and decisions among those impinged on by these crises (Landolt 222; Basch et al. 178; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 9; Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* 44–46). For the case of Nigeria that is figured in the target texts, this period was marked by economic and political meltdown associated with clamour for democracy as well as International Monetary Fund-induced Structural Adjustment Program which required a raft of austerity measures, a consequence of which was deterioration in working conditions and a plunge in wages for professionals (Mberu and Pongou, para.24; Fasakin 299). *Americanah*, *Purple Hibiscus* and the short story 'American Embassy' provide an in-depth thematisation of this economic

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<sup>1</sup> Transnationalism's multiplicity is evident in what Steven Vertovec alludes to as its facets (*Transnationalism* 1–12; 'Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism' 449–56). Vertovec identifies up to six such facets, namely, transnationalism as social morphology (essentially a border-crossing social formation; this is the premise underlying Thomas Faist's contemplation of the idea of transnational social space that he describes ('Transnational Social Spaces out of Migration' 213–14)); transnationalism as a type of consciousness constituted of multiple identifications; transnationalism as cultural inter-permeation; transnationalism as cultural reproduction that involve syncretism, bricolage, cultural translation, hybridity and creolization; transnationalism as economic enterprise; transnationalism as border-crossing political engagement (involving collective entities such as home-town associations formed by migrants abroad to pursue political interests back home); and transnationalism as (re)construction of locality through deliberate transfer and rebasing of "practices and meanings derived from specific geographical and historical points of origin" (*Transnationalism* 1–12)

and political crisis both as basis for configuring narrative topography in the texts through emigration and as well as for calling into question the implicated political practices through the presented characters' consciousness raised amidst cross-border experience.<sup>2</sup> Before the advent of this theoretical exercise of accounting for cross-border embeddedness of mobile persons, immigration research and scholarship brought to view only one-ended adaptation processes, namely assimilation into the host country society and ethnic pluralism (multiculturalism) within the host country, an understanding which was thus overdetermined by container model of the nation-state (Itzigsohn et al. 317; Sager 43; Faist, 'Transnational Social Spaces' 214–15; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 303–08).

This conceptualisation of migrant cross-border embeddedness is seized upon in the dissertation as a departure point for the claim that migrant characters in the research texts inhabit transnational social spaces which place them, individually and structurally, as socially significant actors with regard to their communities of origin. As transnationalism has diverse facets, this dissertation is interested in those facets salient in migrant characters' ways of adapting to their migration routes and the attendant awakened sense of socio-cultural rootedness, namely transnationalism as social morphology, as a type of consciousness and as re-construction of locality. The rationale for discriminating between the facets, first, is that central objectives in this study is to explore the ways by which migrant characters develop a consciousness of their identities (racial and national) away from home contexts (implying that aspects of their sense of their identities are muted prior to emigration, such as consciousness and problem of being black and the liability of being Nigerian outside of Nigeria). Secondly, interest in transnationalism as reproduction of locality is instrumental in the exercise of delineating how the characters establish an orientating footing in alien contexts. Thirdly, as a mode of cultural reproduction transnationalism is relevant in contextualising Adichie's fiction as an aesthetic practice of articulating experience within transnational location. In other words, with respect to the latter mode of transnationalism, we are enabled to narrow down to literature as aesthetic embodiment and representation of experience within what Faist refers to as transnational space.

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<sup>2</sup>In what reconstructs a similar crisis in *Americanah* and *Hibiscus*, Mberu and Pongou report that:

Due to inflation, salaries in 1991 were so low that a professor in Nigeria earned 1 percent of the salary of his counterpart in South Africa, leading to low morale and low quality of teaching and research and a series of industrial strikes. Many professors sought better opportunities in the private sector or as consultants to the government or international organizations. ; others migrated to the Middle East, South Africa, and other countries.(para.116)

Peggy Levitt builds on theories of transnationalism in order to extend the range of what migrants remit to their communities of origin beyond the widely acknowledged financial remittances. Levitt argues that itinerant persons traffic unquantifiable social attributes which they synthesize in the course of migration (*The Transnational Villagers* 54; ‘Social Remittances’ 927). She refers to this channelizing of socio-political attitudes, dispositions and values to their communities of origin as social remittance. These attributes are of three dimensions, namely remittances as normative structures, systems of practice and social capital (‘Local-Level Forms’ 927; *Transnational Villagers* 57-63). Normative structures encompass values, ideas and beliefs that govern a migrant’s social outlook whereas systems of practice include the wide range of manifestations of the normative values in migrants’ social praxis (*Transnational Villagers* 59-62). Thirdly, there is social capital, à la Bourdieu (21), which refers to those acquired individual and collective traits that may be conceived of as assets in social action (North-South Centre 2006). But to Jørgen Carling, Levitt’s disentangling of social remittance from monetary remittance is unnecessary, even counterintuitive, because monetary remittance is in itself a social operation (Carling 225–26). As an alternative approach to remittance in general as inherently both economic and social, Carling offers a concept which he terms remittance script as a structure and logic by which social remittance is produced and transmitted (220). Carling’s concept conjures up interpersonal relations (between the sender and the recipient) which provides a conceptual angle crucial in delineating the process by which mobile characters transmit values and ideas they develop while abroad to the non-mobile connections. Carling’s thesis runs thus: a remitter, for example, sends financial value to a recipient in his or her country of origin and asks that the sum of money be used prudently for a certain purpose; the recipient is obliged to decrypt, from the nature of relation informing the transaction relation, what prudence should entail in expending the money; ultimately, if the money is actually used prudently, values pertinent to prudence are cultivated, or in Carling’s own words, “routinized” in the non-migrant’s value matrix.

The aim here is to trace individual migrant’s evolution of ways of seeing as such individual scales social and national boundaries, and as they enter into scripted relations with their non-mobile compatriots which can be probed for their social remittance significance. Carling defines script in a way that makes it seamlessly adaptable to the objective here of centering the narrative feature of focalisation: “scripts in the *social-psychological sense represent approximate and implicit knowledge*” (221 emphasis mine) of expected roles and actions within a given context and given a particular nature of interpersonal relations. By

featuring narrative focalisation, therefore, it becomes possible to trace the socio-psychological minutiae of the decrypting and execution of what Carling refers to as “approximate and implicit knowledge” where migrant/non-migrant relations are involved (in other words the process of social remittance transmission from migrant to non-migrant). Remittance script, in the way it draws into social remittance debate complex interpersonal relationships as avenues and channels of transmission, especially bodes well for an analysis of remittance relations between different focalising agents in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The protagonists in the novel are a mix of those with experience of life abroad and those with no such migration experience. Aghogho Akpome has undertaken a study of influence patterns between characters in the novel and points out that there is a category of characters he terms primary focalizers and secondary focalizers, where the latter “directly and/or indirectly exert considerable psychological and ideological influence on the primary focalisers” (Akpome, ‘Focalisation and Polyvocality’ 28). If consideration is put on the fact that these secondary focalizers have migrant backgrounds, then the necessity of social remittance optic on *Half of a Yellow Sun* becomes even more tenable. This dissertation thus seeks to expand existing critical focus on the novel to include salient social remittance questions that it raises.

The literary site that provides an arena for exploration of the mobile characters’ organic cross-experience of multiple social and national locales is narrative focalisation. Gérard Genette proposed the term focalisation to encompass the perceptual, conceptual or psychological field or medium through which the fictional phenomena filters to us as consumers of fictional texts (*Narrative Discourse* 189). In expanding on this conception of focalisation, Mieke Bal states that for every presentation of events in a work of fiction, there is always a “vision” (142) through which these events materialise. This is the writer’s deliberately chosen “way of seeing things, a certain angle” (142) captured in other narratological terms as point of view, narrative situation and narrative perspective. In effect focalisation in fictional narrative is a “mediation of some ‘prism’, ‘perspective’, ‘angle of vision’, verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his [narrator’s]” (Rimmon-Kenan 71 single quotation in the original). W. J. T. Mitchell captures this concept of focalization when he asserts that a perspective, as here referred to as focalization, connotes a “repertoire of cognitive and conceptual filters” that interpose between the reader and the story world presented in a narrative (quoted in Boersma and Schinkel 315–16). Focalisation can thus be outlined as abstract perceptual, conceptual, psychological and ideological repertoire in play in the course of narration but which is not necessarily attributable to the voice or

narrating agent. In this sense, the way a narrative is focalised conditions how this world is processed by the readership, as well as indicative of how the focalising agent relates to that world or perceives the objects or values inherent to it. For the purposes of this work, focalisation is thus an opening through which we have a glimpse at content of the characters' ontological experience as migrants in social, political and national contexts marked by differences. The coming chapters embrace the aspect of focalization for three functions that help address the objectives informing the overarching arguments here. Firstly, from the way the narratives are focalized it is possible to determine what Boersma and Schinkel refer to as conceptual filters and cognitive repertoire as the prevailing regime of values, ideas and attitudes at the points where focalizing agents depart and settle. Secondly, with the feature of focalization it is possible to trace the processes in the transformation of the focalizing agents' values, attitudes and ideas as these obtain in Nigeria where they depart. Thirdly, with focalization it is possible to mark out the distinctive ways of seeing of the returnee migrants and therefore justifies assertions of social remittance that mark their return.

Centering aspect of narrative focalisation is particularly crucial against research perspectives that Kalir observes are "predominantly fixated on the movement of people across national borders"<sup>3</sup>, a fixation that has tended to eclipse attention to what this mobility means "through the eyes" of those involved in crossing those borders (311). Though the fact of crossing national boundaries carries weighty and far-reaching implications in terms of sum-total effect of such mobility, especially where this involves Global North-Global South economic relations, Kalir's concern is valid considering that those who traverse international boundaries are not merely organisms in motion but are subjects to whom such movements bear idiosyncratic meanings. This makes the case for a study of individual focal fields in Adichie's narratives as an avenue to describe transformation in ways of seeing relative to the borders that have to be scaled in the course of migration.

The dissertation thus argues that in their unhomely place of settlement (and thus an encounter with new constitutive forces), coupled with their physical dislocation from the constitutive forces of home

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<sup>3</sup> This should be seen as Kalir's criticism of transnational optic which, according to him, has become too attentive to the activity of traversing national borders without a proportionate attention to the perspective of the human subject involved in activity of mobility of any kind, whether this involves crossing a national border or relocating between intra-national locations.



(what Michel Foucault terms “familiar transparencies” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 111)) the migrant protagonists are bereft of meaning-securing canvas which guarantee correspondence between signifier and signified. The essence of the argument is that mobility across national and social borders engenders a liminality that is explored in the dissertation for its social remittance import insofar as this liminality is “always a point of *emergence*” (Bhabha 41 emphasis in the original) of the radical subject. By embracing the ways the narratives in the oeuvre are focalised, the aim is to ultimately explore the liminal experience resultant from transnational lives of the protagonists in order to account for their radical subjectivity vis-à-vis their home societies in Nigeria.

### **Transnational location as socio-ideological *limen***

An examination of focalising agents’ re-adaptation of value systems from two worlds in Adichie’s fictional engagements enables a synthesis of idiosyncratic perceptual, psychological and ideological negotiation of an interstitial location as the difference between divergent orders of identification (namely that structuring the place of origin and that structuring destination contexts) (Bhabha 2). In turn, the in-between acclimation and the new ways of seeing it affords can then be approached as forms of social remittance that each of the narrative discourses in the oeuvre proffer.

This engagement with the oeuvre of Adichie on the subject of social transformation comes in the context of what Guy Standing has highlighted within global economy as potential agent of such a transformation. For Standing, the precarious status of migrants, notwithstanding their victimhood, carries within it the possibilities of their radical agency. Migrants, Standing avers, form part of what he identifies as the precariat, a part of the human population emergent from the conditions of global market economy essentially because they experience “rights insecurity” due to attenuation in their citizenship rights (“Transformative Class’ 1; *The Precariat* 93–95; ‘The Precariat and Class Struggle’ 6). The precariat’s agency derives from its quest to “abolish the conditions that define its existence” (“Transformative Class’ 1). Protagonists in the focus texts move out of homeland Nigeria with a consequent loss of citizenship rights upon arriving in America, but as the dissertation seeks to demonstrate in a way that reinforces Standing’s observation about the agentic potentials of migrants as precariat, the mobile focalizing protagonists do not only struggle against oppressive social regimes in America but they carry over their successes in those struggles abroad to further struggles in their

homeland Nigeria upon return. These terms of carrying over their successes to the homeland battlefield after struggles abroad is approached here as social remittance.

In this engagement with Adichie's fictional world, Bhabha's and Bugeja's theoretical articulation of liminality is pertinent. Bhabha postulates that it is within the *limen* that an ethic of political engagement is produced. He wrests from Jacques Lacan the concept of desire (one of elements within the libidinal economy of the psyche crystallizing with the child's initiation into the Symbolic Order)<sup>4</sup> so as to illuminate the production of this ethic of political engagement resulting from migrants' encounters with societal dynamics different from those in their source societies. With respect to the works of Adichie, protagonists move from a Nigeria that is governed by a different set of regulatory discourses, and settle in an American social scape that is attended by a different set of discourses regulating social boundaries. In effect, these protagonists have to negotiate an in-between or liminal location between the two worlds they occupy. For Bhabha, liminal space is a "conflictual yet productive space in which the arbitrariness of the sign of cultural signification emerges within the regulated boundaries of social discourse" (172), setting in motion a political desire instrumental in questioning and destabilising these constructed boundaries.<sup>5</sup> Liminality thus arises from this unbuckling of arbitrary character of the relation between signifier and signified. Bhabha recasts this idea and redeploys it in proffering a subversive location within discourses of modernity. As the presented characters move to America where prevailing social set-up (with specific reference to racial identity of these characters) is pre-determined by the hegemony of whiteness, they experience a slump in their social status and thus a loss of agency. But Bhabha and Paul Jay argue that agency does not derive from stability and persistence of modes of knowledge and

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<sup>4</sup>In Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, there are three elements which organize the human psyche in a triadic structure; these are need, demand and desire. Need refers to the innate tension which arises out of biological reasons, such as hunger, and is satisfied or "discharged" upon acquiring the relevant object (e.g food); demand on the other hand is a coupling of this innate tension resulting from biological or organic shortage with an accompanying tension to be loved by the other as an end for satisfaction of need; demand yields desire as the "leftover even after the needs have been satisfied" and is characterised as an always unconscious, insatiable force, "constant in its pressure and eternal" (Evans 36–38, 125).

<sup>5</sup>Liminality as conceptually deployed in postcolonial theoretical prism by Bhabha derives from Arnold van Gennep's anthropological three-phase formulation of all rites of passage, entailing an initial phase of separation, *limen* (threshold or margin) as the middle passage, and lastly re-aggregation (cited Turner 94). Victor Turner conceptually expands this formulation, projecting it as processes or phases attending "all forms of movement in social life" rather than just rituals *per se* (Lambek 358). Liminal phase in this Turnerian sense is essentially understood as governed by the dissolution of semiotic order that condition pre-liminal state (in this threshold, Turner avers, "a new arbitrariness appears in the relation between signifier and signified – things cease to signify other things, for everything *is*") (quoted in Kalua 3 emphasis in the original).

action (tradition and customs) as well as identity. On the contrary, they convincingly argue that from the immanent capacity of these modes of knowledge and action “to be re-inscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend the lives of those ‘in the minority’”, that also characterise the liminal lives of immigrants (Bhabha 2 single quotation in the original; Jay 3). Bhabha’s liminality, therefore, foregrounds modernity’s (also read as Western) hegemonic normalization of “uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples” as well as hegemonic set up of cultural difference (Bhabha 171, 175). In this sense, *limen* is a discursive space brought into being “in the process of “othering” subjected communities and cultural contexts” (Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 14 middle quotation in the original). This dissertation intends to describe the structures of transnationalism in the works of Adichie as a means to highlighting the liminal locations of the protagonists presented in her fictional narratives. This highlighting will serve another purpose of tracing these protagonists’ threshold consciousness as part of the exercise of explicating the processes by means of which focal characters and narrators forge ways of (en)countering social discrimination and entrenching an ethic of engagement, (as forms and contents for remittance).

Levitt, the scholar at the forefront of social remittance debate, alludes to the liminal character of the transnational space, in the context of the debate on social remittance, through her gesture towards liminality’s corollary of hybridity and the uncanny, albeit without elaboration (Levitt, ‘A Transnational Gaze’ 21, 27). Levitt, citing Doris Sommers, notes agentic value of creative industry inasmuch as this industry “interrupt” or “unblock” customs (Levitt, ‘A Transnational Gaze’ 27). Levine corroborates this in her essay “‘The Strange Familiar’: Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie’s *Americanah*” which illustrate how the migrant character from in-between hybrid location interrupts habit through defamiliarising the familiar (“‘The Strange Familiar’” 588–91). However, interest in this dissertation is not confined to how the text as a cultural artefact interrupts customs but rather it invests in exploring the ways of seeing as these are being re-oriented and crystalized into new attitudes, values and practices as borders are scaled. Bhabha’s appropriation of Lacan’s concept of the galvanising desire arising from traumatising unmooring from identity plenitude characterising homeland imaginary order, is therefore foundational here in articulating political desire among the dislocated protagonists who have to contend with disturbance in identification. In this sense transnational location is *alimen* where the subject is divested of a sense of identity plenitude, an ambiguous “[socio-] cultural realm that has few or none of

the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner 94–95), in effect engendering a Lacanian desire (what Bhabha refers to as a political desire) within the locus of identification.

This confounding deprivation of guarantee of signifier-signified correspondence defines liminality, a condition of emergency (in the sense of urgency and exigency of survival) and being such a condition is inseparably also “always a point of *emergence*” (Bhabha 41), a moment in which Lacanian desire is precipitated. In this dissertation, this condition of emergency, treated as conjunctural moment in focalising agents’ transnational identification, is interrogated for its significance in emergence of agentic desire that can be traced to the mobile protagonists’ homeland as social remittance. In this liminal location, correspondence between body as signifier (skin colour and hair, genitals) and identity as signified (race and ethnicity, woman) as constituted by familiar transparencies become problematic and come to be seen as such. In this threshold, according to Bhabha, the familiar transparencies and the entire identification it affords are thrown into sharp relief, rendering them objects of liminal migrant’s objectifying gaze, and therefore critiqued as the uncanny (47). Equally, the uncanny-precipitating power of a peculiar temporality provokes the liminal migrant’s “transitive”<sup>6</sup> exercise of interrogating migrant’s own identity. Therefore, the critique that the threshold opens up is not limited to interrogation of one’s own identity, but also extends to similar critique of “the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed” (Bhabha 47), or that which Foucault has termed familiar transparencies. In this sense, agency (Bhabha’s “‘right’ to signify from the periphery of authorized power” (2–3 single quotations in the original)) is a borderline practice that will be exploited in the subsequent chapters in delineating processes by which focal centres construct forms and content of social remittance.

## Theoretical and methodological departure points

As this work engages with literary materials as the sources of data, it is informed by the essential tenet of what has been termed literary transnationalism. Literary transnationalism is a “literary recognition and representation of the flow of people, ideas and goods across cultural and national boundaries” (Morgan 4). Peter Morgan provides a lucid characterization of literary transnationalism apposite to the

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<sup>6</sup> Bhabha here uses “transitive” to suggest the sense that by the same means that familiar transparencies are rendered objects of the subject’s objectifying gaze, so is the same means deployed in the reflexive.

task of interrogating Adichie's oeuvre as aesthetic reification of a transnational ethic that intervenes in the unequal global relations, with the West on one hand (invariably represented by America in Adichie's works) and the black world (represented by Nigeria) on the other. In a definition more amenable to the rallying point in the next chapters, Morgan points out that "literary transnationalism identifies that point at which two or more geo-cultural imaginaries intersect, connect, engage with, disrupt or conflict with each other in literary form" (14). Nowhere are these relations between geo-cultural imaginaries more salient than in the formal aspect of focalisation, evident in the manner in which ways of seeing are presented in the narratives. In the focus texts, the ways of seeing or focalisation schemas are contrived such that they exist dialogically, contrastively, intersectionally (these three focalisation relations will be crucial in exploring migrant characters' processes in generation of social remittance contents) or exist disruptively (this latter form or relations will be basis for deliberating on social remittance transmission). With respect to focalisation in the focus narratives, I seize upon the assertion that "literary transnationalism involves a level of cognitive dissonance as the recipient [migrant] interprets and processes the differences and similarities of 'nation' and 'other', or of 'us' and 'them'" (Morgan 14 single quotations in the original). Therefore, complementary to sociological conception of transnationalism, literary transnationalism will be retrieved as part of the assembled analytic toolkit which includes, CRT and Bhabha's and Bugeja's postcolonial formulation of liminality. The specific literary element by which to lay claim to transnationalism in the narratives and which is tapped for analytic use is the narratological feature of focalisation as an integral part of narrative discourse, that colours the entirety of what is presented in the fictional universe.

As Adichie's works consistently bring up questions of race and racism in the context of migration, critical race theory (commonly codenamed RaceCrit and abbreviated as CRT), is seized upon in order to calibrate the presented America's racial climate that attend the arrival and unsettling of the mobile protagonists. It is necessary to interrogate the function of this racial climate since, as Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller and Christina Szanton-Blanc aver, susceptibilities on basis of ethnicity and race increase likelihood of mobile persons' adoption of transnational life stance (Basch et al. 27–28; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 9). CRT coalesces multiple perspectives, but all of which centre the problematic of relation between power, racism and race (Delgado and Stefancic 2, 6–9; Dixon 233). It posits that in the modern world, dressed with façades of colour blindness, equality, liberty, judicial neutrality and hordes of other "racial progress narratives", racism thrives unabated though its

workings is camouflaged by its being thinly distributed through the social system (Delgado and Stefancic 3; Ray et al. 148–49; Minda 167–73; Gillborn and Ladson-Billings 342–44). Kimberlé Crenshaw *et al* encapsulate the basic premises of CRT by pointing out that racial configuration of American society works at the behest of white supremacy which withdraws itself to the background, continues to reap the benefits of the configuration at the expense of persons of colour, and that this hidden oppression should be confronted (cited in Gillborn and Ladson-Billings 342; Delgado and Stefancic 6–9). For this project, CRT offers a framework by which to explain socio-psychological subjections borne by focalising characters as they confront the American world structured in racial terms and how experience of these subjections are foundational in engendering a counter-agency that is traceable (as social remittance) to the characters’ socio-political engagements on return to their homeland.

I take cue from Dicken, et al, that social activity over and across the border is not to be simply taken as mere social activity whose only uniqueness is boundary traversal but should be approached as a socially productive activity courtesy of the intermission occasioned by national, and therefore social, boundaries (96). Lacriox, Levitt and Vari-Lavoisier write that transnationalism positions migrants as ‘bridge builders and translators’ who recast and ‘vernacularize global norms’ then diffuse them towards their communities of origin, with far-reaching implications on socio-political configurations of such communities (2). In this sense, migrant protagonists in Adichie’s narratives transit from their communities of origin in Nigeria characterised by certain forms of normative structures and are embedded in host nations, namely the USA, where they are governed by different regimes of social, political and cultural forces (see Levitt and Glick Schiller 1013). This dissertation seeks to illustrate how migrant focalizing characters synthesize their social orientations out of the differential effect that the regimes of forces in the source community and that in locations of settlement has on them, corroborating Levitt and Schiller’s assertions (1013–15).

As pointed out above, one of the premises underlying this undertaking is that the adverse conditions in the migrating protagonists’ homeland (Nigeria) as well as those in the adopted homeland of America bode well for the protagonists’ forging of insurgent in-between transnational **spaces of self-articulation**. Through the presented displacement, migrants’ vulnerabilities in the racialized and class-structured America interpenetrate and mutually intensify with other forms of susceptibilities (based

on identity and culture) that focal characters carry with them from their homelands (Jay 118). In a work that parallels that undertaken here, Paul Jay subjects this thinking to his reading of the Indian writer, Kiran Desai's novel *Inheritance of Loss*. The novel weaves together, on one hand, narratives of undocumented immigrants in America (among whom is Biju, a struggling Indian man) contending with racism and circumscribed by harsh survival options, and on the other hand, narrative of India's ethnic divisions which despite celebratory euphoria of emigration, keeps the fate of Biju sealed as he returns to India. Biju is dejected at the odds against his life in America, compounded by his religious and cultural background, and is even further devastated as ethnic separatists dispossess him on his return to India so that he had "far less than he'd ever had" (Desai 349). As it is evident from the migration dynamics in Desai's novel, experiences vary depending on different contextual factors. Whereas return migration in her novel is defined by loss of agency, I set out through transnational optic to draw the opposite from Adichie's fictional rendition of this return against Nigeria's contextual dynamics. In order to have a grasp of focal agents' worldview, and how this are transformed because of mobility, it will thus be necessary to sketch the prevailing discursive social structures (which condition what Levitt refers to as normative structures and systems of practice) in Nigeria as well as in America as Adichie explores them in her works. Interest, though, is to go beyond outlining the socio-political values, attitudes and practices inherent in migrants' communal exit points (Nigeria) and entry points (specific American places where the protagonists arrive) as portrayed in the research texts. In stepping beyond this outline of socio-political attributes, a further argument is made to the effect that the double-embeddedness of migrants enables a deconstruction of socio-political perspectives that in being subsequently remitted via social and symbolic ties constituting transnational social space, (re)aligns the foregrounded normative structures and systems of practice. Even so, Levitt's perspective comes up short concerning the objective here of tracing socio-psychological minutiae or mechanics involved social remittance generation. Through the tool of focalisation, it becomes possible to subject focalising characters' socio-psychological processes to Bhabha's and Bugeja's theoretical apparatus of liminality that facilitates a systematic trace of how the focalising protagonists process divergent value systems (Nigeria and American) in effect generating new values feasible and visible only from in-between transnational location.

As the mobile protagonists' socio-psychological processes will be mapped out in terms of the narratives' focalization, inquiry will be made into the liminality in the represented Self-Other relations



in the texts. Bhabha describes liminality that lie at the level of intersubjective relations between Self and Other (namely, authority of white America and the African immigrant as Other). Intersubjective encounter necessarily involves liminal disjuncture within opposing frames of reference. One frame of reference for Bhabha, and for this project as well, is Western affirmative beliefs about humanity, freedom, diversity, tolerance (all that falls under the rubric of what Bhabha refers to as *Socius*) as espoused in ideals of democracy, are disrupted by stereotypic (and thus epistemological) constructions, “out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories”, of black (immigrants)<sup>7</sup>(Bhabha 42; Fanon 84). Bhabha argues that in contexts involving processes of othering, there emerges intersubjective liminality in which the epistemic aggressor “break up the black man’s body and in the act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision is disturbed”(42). Significance of this liminality will be explored in chapter four in the exercise of demonstrating its agentic import in the wider aim of accounting for how forms and content of social remittance come into being.

In order to assert that the protagonists returning to Nigeria arrive with insurgent perspectives, rather than as complicit in their own subjection, Bhabha’s formulation of radical subjectivity is embraced. Bhabha avers that the agent emergent from liminal location is itself paradoxically a kind of subject but which engages in negotiatory practices from a “third locus”, as a differential location (Bhabha 184). To demonstrate this emergence of agent subject, he resorts to the analogy of Barthes’s illogic of daydream and sentence. Daydream illogic (a parallel of being before subjecthood) lies outside the sentence (a parallel of the determining symbolic order).<sup>8</sup> By appeal to Barthes, Bhabha asks us to take language user’s acquired ability to string lexical items correctly into an appropriate syntax (that is linguistic competence *à la* Noam Chomsky (3–4) as the “power of completion” as a parallel of the signification system’s or discursive formation’s power to ring fence the subject’s meaning making process and therefore outlook. From this analogy it can be inferred that Bhabha’s liminal personae (the being outside the sentence/not yet subsumed in the determining identificatory order connoted by the sentence) is non-subject, capable only of grasping what Roland Barthes terms “pulsional incidents”(quoted in Bhabha 180) within a discursively constituted space as these incidents are focalised by this personae from without that order. This location, according to Bhabha avails such

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<sup>7</sup>Bhabha’s subject is the colonized black, while in this work the subject in focus is the Nigerian migrant in America.

<sup>8</sup>In Bhabha’s usage of sentence, there is play between implicature of grammatic rules and imposed judicial judgement which *binds* a convict.



liminal personae as potentially subversive forces or agents within the determining symbolic order (183).<sup>9</sup> Agency emerges liminally, in the urgencies and exigencies of time of here and now, as retroactive negotiation of meaning of these pulsional incidents (183). In other words, significance or meaning of the incidents always emerges as retroactivity, an “afterwardness”, a contingent closure (185) in the continuing temporal experience. Agency in this sense occurs in negotiatory manoeuvres involving subversion, appropriation and improvisation (183). However, Bhabha is awake to the possibility that such negotiatory manoeuvres can be idiosyncratic practices of the agent, rather than a gesture towards a shared reality. To guard against this Bhabha’s agent as subject emergent from liminal space does not so emerge of itself (its own determining force) nor in itself (a primordial self cleaved from the imperatives of determining symbolic order). Bhabha avers that the emergent agent is an effect of the intersubjective and therefore a kind of subject (185). The agent as subject emerges in the context of relations with other subjects within the signification order though located in the “third locus” (the space that emerge as the difference between differences), implicating the value of contamination resulting from such intersubjective relations (184). In Erin Runions’ words emergence of agency as at the same time subject formation is “tied up with, but can also disrupt, ideology” (76). Chapter four focuses on the negotiatory practices, specifically in *Americanah*, associated with emergence of agent subject, practices that are to be regarded as subject to remittance. In conceiving of such a subject as both tied up with, yet disruptive of, ideological order, an in-between position is contemplated for this subject as a double (agent yet subject). Because of this doubleness, it has been identified as radical subject which by its nature engages in manoeuvres challenging existing discursive formations and in so doing reveal the ulterior workings of power (Rossdale 2; Blunden 418). Radical subject is thus that which embodies a striving for “becoming otherwise” than as discursively determined in being situated within a given place and time (Rossdale 2). Border-transgressing focalising agents in the texts are approached in the dissertation as engaging in radical work not only of reshaping themselves but also of engaging in the project of challenging discursive workings of power in the places they are hosted as migrants and by so doing hone forms and contents that are subsequently remitted home as social remittance.

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<sup>9</sup> Bhabha suggests this by referring to determining symbolic order as “timeless capture” which is “interrupted and interrogated”; liminal space is thus disruptive of “occidental stereotomy” (a term Bhabha borrows from Derrida) as the system of binaries (“subject and object, inside and outside” that undergird the determining symbolic order or what is also referred to as “text of authority” (Location 182; Bugeja Postcolonial Mashriq, 13).

Though Bhabha's conception of liminality is apt for the task of deliberating on generation of social remittance, however, this needs augmenting in terms of its operationalization for purposes of describing liminality in the research text. Bhabha's postulation on liminality leaves open the question of its particulars, especially relevant in relation to one of the items in focus here (focalisation), namely the subjective consciousness as the medium by which liminality manifests. Nobert Bugeja has adapted and rethought Bhabha's idea of threshold and has sought to operationalise it. For Bugeja, liminality is a fraught consciousness that derives from erratic memory's present attempt at grasping a founding or originary experience, event or circumstance (Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 6,16,19,23; Bugeja, 'Reincorporative Trajectories' 11–13). In a bid to establish his theoretical foray into how Bhabha has conceptualized liminality and how it has been generally appropriated in postcolonial studies, Bugeja poses:

What do Bhabha's "acts of cultural enunciation" consist of in the real world? If ... thresholds do indeed carry 'the burden of the meaning of culture', what may be the properties and effects of such liminal spaces? (*Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 12)

What Bugeja asks is the question of locus by which Bhabha's enunciatory acts are conducted and his answer is that it is in human consciousness given to memorialising. As a corrective to this anonymity in terms of the particulars of the liminal space as put forward by Bhabha, Bugeja re-conceives liminality as a function of dialectic relation between erratic memory, in the time of here and now, as it impacts on and as it is impacted upon by material founding realities. It is a dialectic product of "the workings of discursive elements and structures of *feeling* upon the *materiality of received history*" ('Reincorporative Trajectories' 13 emphasis mine). By this he suggests that liminality is a space consequent to relations between present subjective processes and material realities on which these subjective processes obtain a degree of their provenance. Bugeja's optic thus enables a conception of the working of memory, in the time of here and now, as "hybrid moment outside the sentence ... *not yet concept ... part analysis*" where the past is recounted in the act of probing the present and the present is narrated by way of scrutinizing the past (Bhabha 181 emphasis mine; Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 19). In approaching liminality in this dissertation, materiality is conceived of in terms of the founding disjuncture (psychological and social) opened in the process of migration.

Bugeja avers that postcolonial narratives (such as Adichie's) appropriate the space of fraught consciousness "both as a locus of resistance *and* as a prosthesis of collusion, a site of relation and a

medium of reification", polarities through which this fraught consciousness forges and endures, even as it discursively works through contingencies of the present material experience ('Reincorporative Trajectories' 11). This memorial-historical threshold, Bugeja's alternate term for this liminality, affords a fraught "... [channel] for the advancement of furtive but nonetheless ideologically *incisive* - perhaps even *insidious* – agendas ('Reincorporative Trajectories' 11 emphasis is mine). This reinforces Bhabha's view of the function of the liminal enunciatory present which he asserts that it "produces the objective of political desire" an impetus that forges "new forms of identification that may confuse the continuity of historical temporalities, confound the ordering of cultural symbols, traumatize tradition" (Bhabha 179). For the purposes of describing liminality in memoir form in the Middle East, he takes Western political, cultural and territorial interventions, characterised by violence of diverse forms (epistemic violence, occupation of Palestine, establishment of the state of Israel, the ending of Ottoman empire and Lebanese civil war between 1975 and 1990), as the founding events lending impetus to the memorializing present (*Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 15–16). In the research texts, the corresponding founding event that Bugeja urges as central in producing liminality is constituted by the event of migration, the sundering of the self from home and situating that self in other places and thus occasioning memory's disjunctive and unsettled grip with its temporal present. Drawing a parallel between Bugeja's significant historical event, the momentous event of migration, conditioned and complicated by transnational horizons of home, including attendant aspirations and ambitions, are here considered as founding moments for liminality. The socio-psychologically disruptive significance of migration is especially explored in *Americanah* in which Adichie stages the value of liminal moment in transnational mobility more conspicuously than in any other of her works so far published. This enables an assertion that narrative trajectory in the novel is characterized by a dialectic relation between the re-membered sociality of homeland and the act or process of re-membering evinced in the ways of seeing through migrant consciousness in the here-and-now of the narrative act. Bugeja's perspective on liminality affords the view that the entirety of narrative, particularly in *Americanah*, is essentially the protagonist, Ifemelu's present disjunctive memorial act of attempting to re-orient her identity (and therefore social position) as an afterwards process. In chapter four Bugeja's assertion is seized upon so as to argue that the protagonist in the novel engages in interrogatory acts whose ultimate end is a social insurgence not only in her present social location while in America but also on her return to her original homeland of Nigeria.

Considering that Adichie's works extensively implicate migration and the inevitable transnational location of the mobile protagonists, therefore, it is urgent that an incisive description of transnational contours in these works is done, with a view to considering the largely unexplored social remittance meanings of this aesthetic interest in cross-border mobility. Secondly, though this attention on Adichie's art is not intended to implicate author's data, influence of the acknowledgeable fact that she lives a transnational life, sharing her time between the United States and Nigeria, cannot be simply ignored as non-informative of the cross-national socio-political structuring evident in her works. Consequently, the undergirding arguments here concur with Jahn Ramazani, that Adichie "produce[s] works that cannot always be read as emblematic of single national cultures" (25; see also Jay 8). This makes necessary transnational perspective on her aesthetic productions even more compelling. It is not a far-fetched assumption that, for being transnationally located herself, Adichie writes with a complex readership in mind, a fact Ramazani reiterates (Ramazani 25). This is to imply that as much as she writes for readership in her adopted homeland, she also has in mind that in the original homeland, as well as the global readership for which the issues she raises are pertinent. In effect, this raises questions of transnational narrative texturing, if only to embody this readership diversity as well as to capture translocal relations between the settings implicated in the narratives.

Adichie's work is strategic for this study because her work has been noted for its "keen perception and attention to diasporic and transnational realities" (Edson 131), especially with the publication of her latest novel *Americanah* that cements this thematic orientation. Since one of the key elements in this study will be transnationalism, her work presents a strategic medium to examine transnational positionings. Notably also, sociologists at the forefront of theoretical and methodological inquiry of transnational phenomenon have resorted to fictional narratives as kinds of representation of migration experience, in order to further their research schema on the fluid phenomenon of migration as a day to day experience in the lives of those in migrant trajectories. In *Beyond a Border* Kivisto and Faist find it strategic to feature fictional narratives of migration experience as apt introduction to the book as instances of "poignant testimonies" of the risks and potentials of migration (Kivisto and Faist 7). They offer Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* to point to possible vicissitudes migrants may encounter during migration (Kivisto and Faist 4–7). In a move that demonstrates the value of literary narratives in expatiating on sociological questions as social remittance and all it entails, Kivisto and Faist see such

narratives as fertile grounds to mine the lived experiences of individual migrants, something that pure sociological inquiry, they admit, elides (7).

This study is thus opportune in demonstrating the value of fictional narratives in approaching and understanding aspects of social realities associated with transnationalism. Literary art presents a strategic medium to explore these realities because in its fictional quest to capture the everyday materiality of those in migrant locations, it presents before us the very tissue of those realities that are otherwise fluid, ephemeral and therefore hard to objectify for scrutiny outside fictional text. As Laura Marks puts it, such a text “sort through the rubble created by cultural dislocation and read significance in what history books overlooks” (quoted in Cooper 7). What is in question here is what a historical chronicle elides are migrant’s perceptual angles, including attitudes and psychological apprehension of their circumstances as migrants. In literary art, Karen Tei-Yamashita articulates, are expressed those personal and human nuances that substantiate history:

With straight history, you ... couldn't express the emotion. You couldn't express those extra things that illustrate history ... I also wanted to bring in a feeling for the sense of place, that scene, the smell. (quoted in Dirlik 210–11)

As it is only through aesthetic tools that Tei-Yamashita contemplates an organic representation of lived experience, we are advantaged to access presented characters' organic experience of social and historical realities they encounter as they grappling with social boundaries and national borders, qua migrants. Taking this position does not purport, however, to demean the value of other disciplines that aim at representing human realities, such as formal history (against which Tei-Yamashita contrasts literary art), and sociology. On the contrary, because of its aesthetic nature literary art strives to capture all “that are left out of history or that may be impossible to contain within historical categories”(Dirlik 210). Also, as literary narratives set down longitudinal migration progress and processes as subjectively experienced and captured through aesthetic resources available to fictional writer, it vitally avails stable text to explore sociological questions which sociologists such as Pessar and Mahler admit is “much more difficult” (832) to conduct empirically given the ephemerality and fluidity of the lived phenomenon. It is for this reason that in this dissertation the aesthetic aspect of focalisation as the Adichie’s aesthetic choice in representing experiencing consciousness of the focal agents is engaged, first in a bid to describe how transnational consciousness is assembled or generated within transnational location (and how in turn this can be understood in terms of social remittance). Secondly,

featuring focalisation in this study of migration and transnationalism bring in what sociological and historical research omits, namely the entire gamut of affective content (emotions and feelings) that attend the lives of those who inhabit transnational space. Affective substance in this case, either act as the “glue of co-dependency” (Skrbiš 234) within this space, or may form the basis for discords at transnational zones of contact where divergent ways of seeing encounter. Studying such affective content of transnational experience is fundamental because this is inseparably a constitutive element of transnational life as Zlatko Skrbis<sup>v</sup> notes:

Migrant stories are linked with the experiences of adjustment, settlement, nostalgia, a shattered sense of belonging, renewal, loss, discrimination, abrupt endings, new beginnings and new opportunities -all potent sources of emotions. (236)

Foregrounding focalisation, which encompass all those frames of affect that condition how the focalised is perceived, is strategic for investigating this vital ingredient of transnational relationships. Within purview of focalisation is both the affective antecedents and the affective outcomes of crossing national borders which inevitably intervene in how Other places, peoples and home are apprehended. This is particularly important given that a number of the texts under study bring to view emotional content most pertinently within the context of familial relationships that span national borders. Skrbis’s view that transnational family necessarily involves “dynamics, flux and change” characteristic of the liminal transnational space, as well as the “unyielding and stable structures” (231) in which the family members are embedded in home country and in the receiving country is therefore invaluable as it foregrounds ways of seeing (implicit in what he refers to as “unyielding and stable structures”).

## **Critical context**

Salience of border-crossings in the narratives has prompted diverse critical perspectives that have foregrounded a number of thematic concerns revolving around questions of identity (most notably racial and gender identities). This dissertation seeks to not only provide a larger canvas on which these identity questions in Adichie’s narratives can be put to perspective, but to also seize upon the questions raised by these critics (to be interrogated shortly) in order to deliberate on the disruptive cross-border social processes that emanate from cross-border identity transformations. This dissertation avers that identity distabilisation, as a corollary of migrant dislocation, can be harnessed for the purposes of reflecting on the insurgent social practices and ideas of these transnationally located characters (either

as returnees or as located abroad, but nonetheless socially influential in their home countries). Focalization is introduced here as an intervention in the available critical perspectives that dwell on transnationalism, identity and social questions in the works of Adichie. With the optic of focalization, it becomes possible not only to trace transformations in the protagonists' sense of their identities, but to also outline process by which radical subjectivity is socio-psychologically generated as social and national boundaries are (en)countered.

Aghogho Akpome and Magdaline M. Wafula have seized upon the feature of focalization for the purposes of critical explication in various novels, including some of Adichie's namely *Half of a Yellow Sun* and selected Kiswahili novels, respectively. Akpome's major interest is on the various focalising agents in the narrative, whereas Wafula aims at delineating generational conflict between the characters in the selected Kiswahili novels, and how focalization techniques have been deployed. Wafula identifies the various focalization techniques in the narratives, namely the various typologies and aspects of focalization as put forward by Rimmon-Kenan (namely ideological, psychological and perceptual facets of focalization), internal and external focalization (as per Bal's and Genette's typology of focalisation). Wafula ultimately concludes that focalization complements the authors' ideological stances with female authors, unlike the male authors, given to 'showing rather telling'. (171). In this study I proceed from the acknowledgement that Adichie deploys a technique in which she strategically uses a variety of focalizations such that these varieties function discursively to orient transnational positionings in her narratives. My focus will thus be on delineating the narrative import of this focalization technique deployed by Adichie in her work. For instance, focus on the disjunct narrative movement (and thus focalization pattern) in *Americanah* where there is constant analeptic and proleptic shifts that call into significance the importance that Adichie places on the contrasting ways of seeing that protagonist evinces in different phases of her border crossing.

Akpome identifies five characters in the narrative as the focalisers in *Half of a Yellow Sun* which he categorizes as primary and secondary. He suggests that the first category of focalizers refers to those whose perceptual rendition of events in the narrative is key in orienting the narrative materials. In the second category, Akpome implies a kind of a focalizer whose perceptual angle configures the perceptual outlook of the primary focalizers. By disentangling the perceptual angles in the novel, one can deduce that Akpome drives towards the conclusion that, under the political and cultural



constraints in the narrative, we are able to witness the divergent “trajectories in the lives” (‘Focalisation and Polyvocality’ 33) of the focalizers. In this proposed work, I build on Akpome’s analysis of focalization in *HYS*, but I will take a contrary view of how the perceptual angles work out in the narrative. Whereas Akpome disentangles the individual perceptual angles progressing quasi-independently to the narrative closure, I will set out to examine the ways in which focalization in the narratives are enmeshed in a way that this can be interrogated for social remittance value. The intention will be to delineate processes by which social remittance is channelled through a form Carling describes as remittance script.

Jasmin Back and /Ucham and Kangira focus on identity formation in Adichie’s *Americanah*. /Ucham and Kangira examine the representation of Afropolitan identity whereas Back is concerned with the narrative strategy and the novel’s principal character, Ifemelu’s imagining of her Nigerian homeland. Back singles out the fact that the narrative in the novel does not follow a chronological order, even though it is not clear in his arguments how this non-chronological ordering of the narrative has a bearing on Ifemelu’s discursive formation of her identity. All the same, Back concludes that ‘her national identity has ultimately a bigger influence on her than her experience with race and racism in America’ (44). Back also suggests that Ifemelu unquestioningly ‘embraces her national cultural identity and returns to Nigeria’ (55). I will take a divergent view that Ifemelu’s national identity, and therefore outlook, is by far not the only major determinant of who she perceives herself to be at the end of the novel. I will also take a different view that Ifemelu is not unquestioning in her relation to her nationality, and that she engages not only in deconstructing the notion about other nationalities but also in similarly treating an externally imposed national Nigerian identity. In examining the Afropolitan dimension of *Americanah*, /Ucham and Kangira appropriate Taiye Selasi’s postulation of the term Afropolitanism and conclude that Ifemelu’s identity formation is a journeying in which she first adopts American identity then, after a while, embraces her Nigerian identity (50). As pointed out earlier, the idea of Afropolitanism has attracted wide-ranging criticism including the charge of commodification that the idea has been associated with. The concept of transnationalism will be adopted in order to avoid the implication of class and commodification which have been associated with Afropolitanism. Also I will be examining the transnational significance of Ifemelu’s journeying, by means of focalization, from Nigeria to the United States and back to Nigeria, not in terms of how this journey re-energizes her patriotism in a linear manner, but in terms of how it makes her question the status



quo of Nigerian national identification, both in the eyes of other nationalities and in those of Nigerians themselves.

Dickson C. and Preye, Akpome and Adééko examine the thematisation of the postcolonial project in the construction of the Nigerian nation in the works of Adichie. Adééko brings to view the theme of migration in the works he focuses on. Adééko concludes that these contemporaries use emigration in their novels as a means to ‘narrative closure’ (12). By this, Adééko suggests that the émigrés, in distinguishing between the personal and the national selves, opt for the safety of the United States, yielding their nationality in preference for commitment to the personal self. It is clear that the analytic scope of Adééko is the depiction of the Nigerian nationhood, which justifies the view that at the exit from the Nigerian national sphere, the narrative with respect to that sphere is afforded a closure. However, John C. Turner et al indicate that the personal and the collective selves are necessarily intertwined (461–62). Arguably, therefore, the mutual relevance of the personal self and the national self, with respect to émigrés in a literary text, does not stop at the very point of vanishing from the national space. Unlike Adééko therefore, who asserts that Adichie uses emigration as a strategy for narrative closure, I will argue in the subsequent chapters that emigration in the fictional narratives of Adichie is a means of escalating the narration to the transnational sphere, with the objective of forging a deconstructive transnational location that problematizes modes of identification at both the point of origin as well that at destination.

Akpome argues that in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie brings to focus the fissured nature of the Nigerian nationhood and that the narrative in the novel privileges the ethnic nationhood over the civic nationhood. According to Akpome, this is a departure from what distinguished the earlier generation of African writers who “vigorously canvassed” in their novels for “the idea of the postcolonial nation as an avatar for disparate cultures and peoples” (‘Narrating a New Nationalism’ 34). Susan Strehle avers that the unsuccessful bid for Biafran secession “strips the novel's protagonist-witnesses of their status as [Nigerian] citizens and propels them into diaspora” (652–53). These protagonists not only lose their homeland after defeat in the Biafra war, but are consequently marked as ‘permanent outsiders’ (653). This uprooted diasporic location, Strehle further adds, enables the protagonist to ‘criticize both previous and present’ national locations. Claims of diaspora in relation to *Half of a Yellow Sun* can benefit from an express utilization of migration optic that widens the interpretive possibilities

to which the narrative can be subjected. In this dissertation, cognizance is taken of the fact that there is deliberate revelation that the lead focalisers (Odenigbo and Olanna) both have migrant backgrounds that clearly shape their current engagements in the fictional Nigeria represented. As Akpome outlines elsewhere ('Focalisation and Polyvocality' 28), these two protagonists exert considerable influence on the non-migrants, specifically Ugwu who is enchanted with the two (Olanna and Odenigbo). Also Akpome's and Strehle's positions can (as will be done in the subsequent chapters) be subjected to a perspectival fine-tuning in order to demonstrate that ethnic fissures and secessionist impulses do not function in and of themselves but are attended, as well, by other forces associated with migrant backgrounds of the protagonists. In the subsequent chapters I present an argument that the fact of crossing borders is essential in understanding the corollaries of nationalism as presented in *Hal of a Yellow Sun*.

Braga and Gonçalves and Jackson conduct an analysis of *Americanah* and the short stories from *The Thing Around Your Neck* on the basis of diasporic experiences of the key characters in the texts. Their interest is on the characters as women in ambivalent relation with their African homeland and the United States as their host country, so that "they wish to stay in the United States and return to Africa at the same time"(2). Braga and Gonçalves approach this ambivalence through what they term "diasporic stream of consciousness"(5–6) by which they suggest the narrative uncovering of the fraught minds of the key diasporic women in the texts. On the thematic level, their analysis provides a relevant point of departure in regarding the characters' perceptual transformations as a result of migration. Braga and Gonçalves's analysis of the texts is also thematically relevant in deliberating on the social remittance, even though the scope of their focus does not extend to the idea of social remittance. Jackson, on the other hand, examines the problem of national locations of the characters in the stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* and argues that the identities of the characters transcend that of nationality, and that their outlooks tend to be cosmopolitan rather than diasporic. Jackson is of the opinion that the characters are cosmopolitan rather than diasporic in the sense that they do not experience the crisis of identity attendant to diasporic locations (1). This argument attracts counter-reasoning on the basis of the claim of absence of identity crisis with regard to the characters' national locations. Even though to some extent this is contestable, Jackson's argument paves the way for me to assert that in transcending the limitations of diaspora, the characters forge a transnational

consciousness that will be utilized in the subsequent chapters in the discussion of social remittance in Adichie's works.

With Adichie's autobiographical data in mind, Cooper highlights the spatial mobility of material culture in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* as she examines the appropriation of the English language medium. Cooper argues that migrant writers like Adichie, bring to view in their narratives produced from their diasporic locations, the material cultures of the communities of origin as "props in the social practices"(2) as they (re)create their new and old identity formations. Cooper's concern, therefore, is on the significance of the writers' diasporic locations in the reproduction of the material culture from the communities of origin. In this proposed study, I intend to seize upon Cooper's notion that migrants reconstitute their national and social imaginings while in their diasporic locations. I will particularly be viewing this reconstitution of their social and national selves as ways of dealing with and adapting to the inhospitable and unhomely migrant location. By grafting such socio-psychological footholds that facilitate the protagonists' subsequent adjustments to such unhomely locations, the argument here recognises that these footholds constitute steps in the protagonists' paths towards liminally emergent radical subjectivity that has far-reaching implications for their home country as social remittance.

Kaigai, Moudouma and Idowu-Faith separately explore the migrant and diasporic locations as depicted in a selection of contemporary African fiction. Kaigai underscores migrants' negotiations of social spaces in the host communities (2), and in case of return migration, in the homeland communities. Idowu-Faith contends that return migration in *Americanah* is brought into the narrative as means of closure to migrant stories as depicted in the novel (33), while Moudouma notes that 'the process of migrating from a familial place transforms the individual' (iii) resulting in a need to negotiate for a social space in the new and the old social setups. These perspectives will be put to the wider perspective of transnationalism which will permit a view of negotiations of social spaces in host society on arrival and in homeland society on return migration as processes in grafting and dissemination of forms and contents of social remittance.

Ngongkum is interested in how characters' simultaneous embeddeness within Nigeria and United States affect these character's lives, the transnational practices they engage in and how this problematize both their sense of home and their identities. Her attention is on 'Imitation', 'The Thing Around Your Neck'

and ‘The Arrangers of Marriage’. The characters, she finds, come to “expand their sense of home to mean both ‘here’ and ‘there’ (81). She also concludes that “[g]oing abroad does not wipe out Nigeria from their consciousness but it diminishes [its] claim as sole source of culture and identity” (91), taking advantage of the differential opportunities in both Nigeria and the United States. Ngongkum thus limits her focus to identity disruptions arising from dislocation, which will be relied on here in deliberating on social remittance value of these disruptions of sense of home and identity occasioned by dislocation. With reference to the short story ‘Imitation’, Ngwira makes the case that for the migrant characters to gain acceptance in host society they have to engage not only in “fetishisation of American history and culture but also in their own exoticisation” (Ngwira 292). This happens, Ngwira contends, through attaching heightened value to elements emblematic of supposedly American values (represented by Liberty Bell and Benjamin Franklin which figure in the narrative) and at the same time in the attempt to resuscitate traditional Igbo cultural emblems (represented by masks which again feature in the narrative). Ngwira’s study of ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’ dwells on “gendered travails of migrant existence” (293) that are reminiscent of sexual exploitation of black women reaching back to America’s slavery era (294). Ngwira argues that, through the fetishisation, especially of American history, the narrative discourse casts aspersion on “America’s acclaimed liberalism and its vaunted freedoms” (295). This is a crucial perspective that is harnessed in this dissertation’s critical review of how migrants deconstruct their social locations, both at home and at host locations that yield a revision of underlying normative values as they construct new in-between transnational locations.

McMann seizes upon migrant transnationalism to show that in *Americanah*, the body is a text that is not fixed but whose meaning (in terms of skin colour) is a product of interpellations in different context with different histories (201). In this dissertation, this observation is extended to show that not only do the meanings of skin colour change, but that this change continually and necessarily engenders engagements among those racialized as inferior. Their practices of engagement, it will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapters, are vital forms of agency that find their way back to their societies of origin as social remittance.

Adichie’s literary art has also provoked a broad conversation revolving around the question of identity construction and disruptions within the transnational ecosystem in *Americanah*. Julie Oosterink, Imogen Simons, Niyi Akingbe and Emmanuel Adeniyi, and Ícaro Luiz Rodrigues de Melo all approach identity

questions, taking Ifemelu's experience as a testament to the significance of contemporary transnationalism. Oosterink privileges that transnationalism is vital in the novel's architecture inasmuch as this enables the protagonist to engage "with both self-discovery and self-fashioning in order to shape the narrative of her past and make a plan for her future" (3). Transnational experience, understood by Oosterink as conditioned by unhomeliness (a Bhabharian concept in postcolonial discourse), is the basic ingredient in the protagonist's identification. Simons is interested in the portrayal of identity construction in the same novel, arguing that this process is essentially transnational and results in the protagonist's hybrid identity (63–64). In their reading of the same novel, Akingbe and Adeniyi on the other hand foreground the transnational meshing of cultures (what they refer to as transculturalism) through "negotiations and contacts" within the fictionalised United States (53). Their motive in this study of *Americanah* is to evaluate the extent to which the novel fulfils what they identify as the bid for transculturalism. De Melo similarly engages Ifemelu's formation and negotiation of identity in the course of migration and in the transnational context where she is simultaneously embedded in home community and the host community in America (98). De Melo instructively deploys the same analytic resources as used in this dissertation, namely Bhabha's concepts of liminality and formation of agency, and Levitt's idea of social remittance. However, de Melo expressly state that the traffic of social values and attitudes in *Americanah* "partially echoes Peggy Levitt's (1998) notion of 'social remittances'" (69). This work seeks to demonstrate that in fact the narrative in *Americanah* is constructed such that the prevalence of the processes of social remittance is highlighted. In order to pursue this end, these critics' concerns with identity are transcended by arguing (as with Bhabha)<sup>10</sup> that identity is not conceived of as an essence but as a performance that has an implication within the context where it is enacted. The reasoning will be that if the focal character's identities undergo transformation when they emigrate, then questions should arise as to what transpires when they return to their homeland with these altered identities. In other words, the dissertation seeks to explore the socio-political ramifications of the altered identities of returning migrants especially in *Americanah* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

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<sup>10</sup>Bhabha argues that "terms of cultural engagement" such as identity should not be viewed as fix entities but rather fluid contextual performance:

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. (2)

## Structure of the dissertation

To recap the guiding objectives informing the primary arguments, this dissertation sets out to address four fundamental elements in Adichie's works. First, it seeks to outline Adichie's societal *topos* or problematic that cross-cut her oeuvre. In the language of Peggy Levitt, it aims to describe the normative structures and systems of practice in the migrant characters' communities in Nigeria where they originate and to which they are transnationally connected. In delineating these structures and practices, the argument takes the detour of focalization, holding that the characters' ways of seeing are impressed with those critical prevailing normative structures. In other words, focalizations in the narratives foreground specific values and norms. Secondly, the dissertation quests for the transnational formation of focalising characters' social universe. What underpins this vital focus on transnational configuration in each of the texts are the assertions within research on transnationalism that border-spanning life set-ups salient in the contemporary world are modes of adaptation or niches for survival in a world characterised by intensity in time-space compression and ensuing border surveillance. Such a niche, it is argued here, constitutes a liminal site within which agency is realized amongst such transnationally located characters. Thirdly, proceeding from the above argument that transnational location is an ideological limen, the focus site narrows down to the focalizing centres' consciousnesses so as to delineate socio-psychological processes by which these characters' values, attitudes and ideas imbibed in Nigeria or encountered in America are destabilized in terms of normative structures. These destabilizations are seized upon in the dissertation as forms and contents of social remittance, and how the transformations are trafficked between sending and host communities as social remittance. Fourthly, having established processes by which agency emerges, the dissertation ultimately seeks illustrate how the agency, especially in *Americanah* and *Half of A Yellow Sun*, is trafficked to Nigeria as social remittance. Pertinent to the exploration of social remittance conveyance to Nigeria, the dissertation also seeks to reflect on the socio-political and socio-cultural ramifications of the social remittances in the migrants' communities of origin. The chapter is broken into various subsections which, though rather appearing tedious, reflect the diverse aspects of transnationalism that Adichie's corpus captures and develops.

To address these goals, the dissertation will be organized into six chapters, the current one inclusive. The next chapter presents a description of the transnational dimension of *Americanah*, and four short

stories from *The Thing Around Your Neck*, namely ‘Jumping Monkey Hill’, ‘The Shivering’, ‘Tomorrow is Too Far’ and ‘Imitation’. Analysis of focalization in ‘Jumping Monkey Hill’ serves to showcase the strategic transnational gaze of the African fiction writer represented metafictionally in the short story. On the other hand, focus on ‘The Shivering’ showcases the operation of the information communication technology and infrastructure that foster transnational adaptation of the characters. This focus on the short story expands on an aspect that is constantly suggested only through implicatures in *Americanah*. However, the mainstay of the chapter is the description of the social network patterns, in terms of character relationships that outline the transnational contours of the social world presented in the narratives. Processes of embedding (as mode of integration) in both America and in Nigeria will be brought to view in the chapter.

Chapter three presents the recurrent normative structures (values, attitudes and ideas) that regulate world view in Nigeria as migrant characters’ point of origin. This presentation will involve an approach to the way relational ties, in terms of the attributes of the characters and narrators and the specific nature of the social relations involved in the narratives. For this purpose, *Purple Hibiscus* and the short story ‘The American Embassy’ which extensively, though not exclusively, dwell on the social habitat characteristic of those which catapult characters to transnationalism locations in Adichie’s oeuvre, is brought to a focus that constantly implicate *Americanah* as a form of narrative iteration of ‘the other side’ of the narrative in *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*. The chapter teases out the social values, attitudes and ideas including but not limited to those relating to gender relations, domestic familial patterns and social status vis-à-vis nationhood. This chapter, therefore, essentially presents one of the ‘sites’ of interest among the multi-sites as proposed in the transnational research paradigm. The other ‘site’ (migrant location) is reserved for chapter four. Through Paul Simpson’s theoretical prism on focalization, an attempt will be made to demarcate the exigent social force of the represented normative structures. In the chapter I seize upon Levitt’s typology of social remittance in order to derive sending communities’ normative formations as status quo. The justification for this attention on these prevailing values, attitudes and ideas is that the rationale for any remittance (be it economic or social) lies in the fact that there exists a deficit that makes logical the need for remittance from abroad. What lies in deficit at home is either found in abundance abroad or is synthesized out of the exigencies of living abroad. This chapter thus not only outlines the attributes of the migrant characters’ homeland (and thus their mental frames on departure to America) but it also doubles up as the point



in the dissertation to highlight socio-political sites that are subsequent targets of migrant characters' social remittance.

In chapter four, the processes and socio-psychological mechanics in play at the critical points in consciousness of focalizers are traced. In the chapter Bhabha's and Bugeja's theoretical tools of liminality are brought to bear on the analysis of the texts. The chapter also takes into consideration Marcus's multi-sited approach and examines migrant characters in the US vis-à-vis pre-emigration mental frames and how these shape their outlook. To define the significance of migration experience in the process of generating social remittance content, focalization schema by which these experiences are presented in *Americanah*, and 'The Thing Around Your Neck' will be interrogated. 'The Thing Around Your Neck' presents the limited aspect of arrival in alien land (the narrative ends with the focal character still sharply aware of the unhomeliness of America. This phase is not only explored at length and breadth in *Americanah* but is further developed to its resolution as the focalizing character (Ifemelu) ultimately finds a niche in the America society. This development up to its resolution in *Americanah* enables a trace of how the focalizing character (Ifemelu) gains mastery and musters her precarious migrant identity, thereby opening avenues for her agency. As stated above it is this agency that enters into Ifemelu's socio-political engagement with her homeland, and thus conceivable as social remittance.

Chapter five contends that social remittances are not passively imbibed in migrants' communities of origin but are subject to contestations. The chapter sets off by a resort to contrast between mental frames of non-migrants and returnees (the latter metaphorically identified as *Americanah*), in an attempt to underscore and affirm the radicalism of the returnees. This strand of the argument takes the short story 'A Private Experience' as exemplary of this contrast in returnee and non-migrant mind-sets. Aside from illustrating the transmission of social remittance, the chapter attends to the ramifications of social remittance from the migrant characters in *Americanah* and *Half of A Yellow Sun*. The focus highlights social and transnational ambivalence engendered by what is remitted, particularly as this is markedly developed in *Americanah*.

Chapter six offers a summary of the key arguments grafted in the preceding chapters, from which conclusions regarding transnationalism, social transfer vis-à-vis social and nation building projects in Nigeria will be drawn. Recommendations for further research will also be proffered in the chapter.



## Chapter Two: Transnational Cartography in Adichie's Fictional Universe

Every immigrant is an emigrant, every alien a citizen, every foreigner a national.  
(Waldinger and Duquette-Rury 42)

### Introduction

As the title of the chapter suggests, this chapter sets out to address the first research question which is to provide a description of transnational contours that structure the texts, namely *Americanah* and four short stories from *The Thing Around Your Neck* ('Jumping Monkey Hill',<sup>11</sup> 'Imitation', 'Tomorrow is Too Far', and 'Arrangers of Marriage'). Towards this end, social network perspective on character ties, including what Wasserman and Faust calls structural and composition variables is collated with the idea of embedding in order to reveal the transnational formation structuring the narratives in a way that reveals deliberate thematisation of this formation. The term cartography is co-opted here to suggest the enduring structures and patterns of transnationalism that obtain in Adichie's pre-occupation with migrant transnationalism. Avtar Brah has similarly used this term in the context of diaspora discourse to suggest the underlying patterns of relationships between those in diasporic locations and those in the original homeland (16).

The short stories antedate *Americanah* in publication and reveal a narrative dallying with the motif of transnationalism. In their formal structure as short narratives, 'JMH', 'Imitation', 'Tomorrow is Too Far' and 'Arrangers of Marriage' present these formations as motific building blocks to develop the specific concerns that the story (as distinguished from discourse) in each of these texts carries. Since they condense Adichie's transnational motific trace, starting off with analysis of the short stories is salutary inapproaching *Americanah* which in its more ample narrative structure as a novel consolidates intricacies of this transnational formation. In this cartographic study of transnational formation in the texts I foreground focalisation and structural variables as "ties of a specific kind" (Wasserman and Faust 29), between cross-border embedded characters which include gender, race and class relation, migration status and how this status configure relations between the characters, in line with

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<sup>11</sup> Henceforth *JMH*

Wasserman and Faust's view of social network<sup>12</sup>. Since attention is kept on narrative focalisation (and as this implicates traits of the focalising characters) attributes of the characters themselves as individuals (what Wasserman refers to as compositional variables (29)) forms part of the concerns of the chapter as these compositional variables condition the way objects, fellow characters and contexts are focalised. Owing to their significance in shaping migrant characters' adaptations to their transitional locations, the chapter also attends to the role that structural variables explored play in establishment of strategies and processes of migrant characters' cross-border embedding.

Throughout this analysis, tripartite components of transnational processes are brought to dialogue. These components encompass, first, the conditions in migrant characters' home locations as provenance of their desire to move or remain embedded there. Secondly, it includes conditions in host locales attending their arrival and embedding. Thirdly, it engages the characters' own simultaneous responses to the operative dynamics in the two locations reflected in the kinds of relationships they enter into in both ends of the transnational location (see Faist, 'Transnationalization' 199–200; and Faist, 'Transnational Social Spaces out of Migration' 217, 224)). The fourth dynamic of cross-border relational ties and how these are significant for migrant characters' navigation and negotiation of transnational locations is also featured as a crucial premise by which it is maintained here that Adichie's narratives thematise transnational linkages.

Adichie's works extensively feature social relations that are grounded within Nigeria but which develop and subsequently transit across this national space. Invariably, her protagonists have to contend with adversities in Nigeria, subsequently succeeding in gaining entry to United States or United Kingdom, where contrary to expectations of such protagonist, they face vicissitudes associated with their psychological overinvestment in opportunities available for them in such Western contexts. Out of these vicissitudes they unvaryingly establish social contact points in these receiving contexts through romance (whether indeed romantic or merely as strategy in embedding themselves in American society), or through informal, workplace sociability of emplacement (Glick Shiller and Çağlar use the phrase sociability of emplacement to evoke those social relations which despite social differences such as nationality, class, race or gender, thrive out of "mutual sense of being human" (19). At the same

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<sup>12</sup> For purposes of this analysis social network is grasped as "a finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them" (Wasserman and Faust 20).

time as the protagonists establish these critical emplacements wherever they first settle upon moving out of Nigeria, they recoup pre-migration social relations readapting them for their cross border needs, especially for establishment of psychological sense of social rootedness while encountering alien settings. In short, Adichie presents characters who enter into social trajectories which, as described by researchers of transnationalism, provide foundations for border-crossing grassroots activities in the form of networks, patterns of living and ideologies (see Bauböck and Faist 13–14; Basch et al. 4; Faist, ‘Transnationalization’ 189–90; Dahinden, ‘Transnationalism Reloaded’ 1482; Vertovec, ‘Migrant Transnationalism’ 970; and Nye and Keohane 330–31).

The short stories selected for analysis in this chapter are approached as Adichie’s appropriation of the short story’s genre in order to explore the *topos* of transnationalism that *Americanah* and *HYS*<sup>13</sup> undertake in a way that they reveal its finer and more complex intricacies. Though the short stories adumbrate transnational processes in their own right as independent texts, the fact that by publication they predate *Americanah* (which revisits in breadth and depth the same processes) strategically enables a view of how Adichie manipulates fragments of transnational phenomena in the tight space afforded by the short story, mustering these fragments in the novel as *tour de force* in narration of transnationalism phenomenon. Preliminary analysis of focalisation structure in the short stories thus facilitates a preview of the more intricate focalisation configuration in *Americanah*’s novelistic architecture.

‘Arrangers of Marriage’ explores the culture of marriage partner matching in a transnational environment where potential partners are wedged apart by spatio-temporal distance. In the story, Chinasa Okafor, the protagonist, is betrothed by her Uncle and Aunty to Ofodile (who is working in America as a doctor) through the latter’s mother who is worried that he would end up marrying an American woman. The narrative dwells on Chinasa’s arrival in America where her new husband lives and her subsequent discovery of Ofodile’s unsettling aliases, his past sexual life and marriage to an American woman. After an enlightening interaction with a neighbour, a liberal American woman, Chinasa musters Ofodile’s betrayal, transforming this into a calculative strategy where she opts to claim legitimate American residence as she bides her time for to work out her independence from her

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<sup>13</sup> Henceforth *HYS*

treacherous new husband. As a short story, it gives a sneak preview of experience of arrival as an immigrant, an experience conditioned by expectations constructed before emigration, which *Americanah* explores more elaborately. On the other hand 'Imitation' centres family life within transnational space and the challenges associated with familial dislocation. Nkem, the woman protagonist is stationed in American by her wealthy husband, Obiora, but who establishes himself in Nigeria. Exploring the same motif of the familial relationships within a transnational space, 'Tomorrow is Too Far' delves into potential disharmonies occasioned not only by continental divide between Africa and America, but also by the disparate ways of seeing that results in familial disjuncture and hence pointing to possible complications that may characterise transnational familial structure. In the story, told in a reflexive second-person narrative perspective, that will be approached here in terms that Nance refers to as "a triplication of self" (372) where the central figure is bifurcated into the component of narrating self as addresser (now enlightened after an a difficult experience), narratee self who is addressee, and as protagonist (who is taken here as the focaliser) involved in the story's events. It involves four child characters (the unnamed girl who is protagonist, her brother, Nonso, and their cousin, Dozie) emerging from youth and just beginning to be inquisitive of their gender locations and sexualities. The unnamed protagonist girl born of estranged couple, an American mother and Nigerian father, is pushed to commit an act that results in the tragic death of her younger brother, Nonso. Out of internal turmoil growing from gender marginalisation (culturally determined in Nigeria but portrayed as parentally instituted in America) she schemes to eliminate her brother by frightening him while he is high up an avocado tree from where he falls to his death. Through this scheme, the unnamed focalising agent (known to us only as younger sister of Nonso, now eighteen years of age), seeks to achieve visibility in a transnational socio-cultural milieu where males eclipse females.

*Americanah* expands the range of social relations that are subject to transnational processes, beyond familial dynamics, bringing within its narrative compass political and social practises as these are subjected to a view from transnational location. A love story between the two central characters, Ifemelu and Obinze Maduewesi, constantly morphs into stories of the difficult experiences of migration and settlement in contexts where their expectations are not always met and where there are already established prejudices against them as black migrants. Earlier in their lives while in Nigeria, their careers disrupted by labour unrest rocking their university studies, their romantic relationship promises a happy future for the two. When Ifemelu subsequently gets a chance to study in the United

States this future becomes even more promising as Obinze is confident he would join her for graduate studies there once he is done with his undergraduate studies in Nigeria. When Ifemelu finally relocates to America, her arrival is initially made bearable as she keeps in touch (through email and telephone connection) with Obinze who is more edified of America. But immigrant life subsequently worsens for Ifemelu as she exhausts her financial resources and is determined to ask her parents, Obinze or her friends in America for financial aid. She opts for a sexual rendezvous with an American tennis coach in exchange for the cash which she direly needs. This proves psychologically disastrous for her as she is wracked by guilt to an extent she has to cut ties with Obinze, a lover she greatly adores. Henceforth, with support from Ginika, her former classmate who came to America earlier, she gradually gains a footing in America, becoming a formidable blogosphere critic of race and racism in America. Ultimately, at the crowning moment of this achievement she decides to return to Nigeria armed with and ready to deploy the prowess of having conquered the awe-inspiring American world, thus completing a transnational circulation both of ideas and of her own person. This is what this chapter seeks to explore as a way of transnationally situating Adichie's oeuvre using these four texts as exemplary of her thematic concern with transnationalism processes.

### **Establishing aesthetic frame and perspectival authenticity: exemplum of 'JMH'**

As pointed out in previous chapter, focalisation is about whose apprehension (rather than whose voice) and therefore authenticity of perceptual data is privileged in the narrative (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 189; Bal 142; Rimmon-Kenan 17). Proceeding from this conceptual basis narrative voice (if any) overlays the mediate presence of the focalising agent only to the extent that it is necessary to convey the agent's processes of focalisation. 'JMH' provides an exemplum of how standpoint in literary art plays a critical function where power relations are implicated and it is in this short story that Adichie most overtly thematises on matters related to perspective in African literary art. Since the text fictionally centres the problem of what constitutes African literary art, it provokes questions of focalisation in its fictional contemplation of circumstances of its production and consumption. In her analysis of metafictional provenance of the short story, Daria Tunca goes so far as to suggest that this text presents as Adichie's "literary manifesto" instructively articulating "in no uncertain terms, what contemporary African fiction is entitled to be" ('The Danger of a Single Short Story' 78). With Tunca's submission and with how the story reinforces this submission, the question of focalisation at

metafictional level is raised because *JMH* in reflecting on fiction writing within a larger frame of fictional work, “aims simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction”, to use Patricia Waugh’s words (quoted in Tunca, ‘The Danger of a Single Short Story’ 70).

As Bundgaard highlights, narrative fiction engages focalisation in one form or another as an absolute necessity in “sustaining the representation of consciousness in literature” (66). In so far as literary art must necessarily require meaning making tools, one of which Bundgaard notes as focalisation that when manipulated by the writer “trigger[s] certain correlated meaning effects” (67), *JMH* reflexively implicates this problem with respect to contemporary Africa fiction. This is especially exigent as African writers are compelled out of Western “need for the exotic” (Kiguru 132) that drives commodification of production and consumption of African literary art. As Doseline Kiguru convincingly argues Western patronage of institutions (such as publishing industry and literary awards bodies) and processes (such as marketing, critical appraisals and media exposure) of literary art’s production and consumption have worked to force an exoticizing writing stance that canonizes “pain and disillusionment” (193). Though this dissertation from the very outset embraces the distinction between narration (voice) and focalisation (mediating consciousness), *JMH* fictionally centres the work of production of the supposedly African literary art, presenting this production as a fictionalised event involving budding fictional writers as characters. Therefore, it foregrounds the significance of mediating writer and their role in projecting the lived experience of being an African as well as the practical experience of creative rendition of this lived experience, in the face of the exoticising gaze of the agents of Western literary industry, represented by Edward as the co-ordinator, together with sponsors of the workshop. The African writer is thus hypothesized in *JMH* as focaliser of the processes and institutions that contend to determine the nature of African literary expression. It is argued here that what is transnational about this metafictional focalisation is the counteractive and interactive basis of its nature. The focal stance assumed in the narrative emerges from dialectical relations between ways of seeing of characters of diverse nationalities, all contending to shape the nature of African literary art.

The narrative is Simpson’s Category B in reflector mode with a negative stance, in which perceptual data is relayed through the fictional writer protagonist, Ujunwa’s active consciousness. From the start

of the narrative discourse, Ujunwa chafes at Edward's cordiality when he comes to receive her at the airport. Equally, though to a lesser degree, she manifests irritation at fellow African writers, as soon as she arrives at the eponymous resort, Jumping Monkey Hill, where the workshop, billed African Writers Workshop, is to be conducted. Edward is at once perceived as ugly, with a face that was "pleasant but unformed, as though God, having created him, had slapped him flat against a wall and smeared his features all over his face" (JMH' 96) and that whenever he smiled, he "showed two front teeth the color of mildew" (JMH' 96). As to why this image of him remains unclear until later passages in the narrative. Before this image of Edward is further developed, there is a painstaking inventory of Jumping Monkey Hill resort that indicates it is a place of luxury and a getaway resort. The cabin windows open towards the sea "so that guests woke up to the rustling of Jacaranda leaves and the steady calming crash of the sea waves. The wicker trays held a selection of fine teas" (JMH' 95). It is inferable that because of this luxury profile of the resort, Ujunwa finds it "incongruous" (JMH' 95) that the workshop should have been convened here. Instead, the location is seen as fitting for "affluent foreign tourists [who] would dart around unaware that there are more black people than re-capped lizards in South Africa" (JMH' 95). As it turns out, this had been Edward's haunt while he taught earlier at University of Capetown.

There is a standoffish sense that define Ujunwa's relation to Edward conveyed by the sedate and self-dignified statements presented in parallel sentence structures that predominate the entire episode, running for an entire page, where they both seem to size up each other (JMH' 96). Throughout this interaction, Edwards speech to Ujunwa is presented as free indirect speech but there is no report made of Ujunwa's replies, an indication that she not only does not want to commit to Edward's conversation but she also finds the same bothersome: "He seemed keen to know more and she did not want to say more, and so when she looked up and saw the Ugandan walking towards them, she was relieved" (JMH' 96–97). Ujunwa's perception of Edward thus sets off in an engaged, adversarial mode, respectively placing them in the positions of protagonist (hero) and antagonist (anti-hero).

Whereas the stance taken against Edward is that which place him as a menace, fellow African writers are regarded with less apprehension, though with a keen sense of scepticism. While reflector mode with negative stance conveys Ujunwa's perception of Edward's untrustworthiness (because of his ulterior motives as an individual who would later affirm this in his sexual gaze at Ujunwa and the



Senegalese writer, and as representative of the persisting British imperialism), negative stance with respect to fellow African participants convey Ujunwa's perception that the participants are either piteous or loathsome victims of the ulterior motives of the workshop. On one side, the Kenyan, Zimbabwean, Tanzanian and South African writers are regarded as well-meaning but piteous victims of Edward and British imperialism, and on the other hand, the Ugandan writer (with a selfish sense of achievement) is regarded as a groveler who (because of having obtained the seal of approval in winning "the last Lipton African Writer's Prize" (JMH' 98)) has fallen to the machinations of Edward's and British literary imperialism. His falling to these machinations is evident to Ujunwa "because of his toadying answers to Edward's questions, the way he leaned forward to speak only to Edward and ignored the other participants" (JMH' 98). The Ugandan writer thus puts on airs of superiority relative to fellow African writers in the workshop, but unmistakably according himself lower in hierarchy to Edward's position as an imperial agent.

The foregrounded narrative modality that manifests Ujunwa's piteousness to the well-meaning African writers is the prevalence of epistemic and perceptual systems. Out of all the participant writers at the workshop, it is only the Senegalese woman who concretizes with a more positive shading. This is attributable to the fact after Ujunwa, she is second most combative vis-à-vis Edward, the anti-hero: "The Senegalese woman *was the most promising, with the irreverent sparkle* in her eyes and the Francophone accent and the streaks of silver in her fat dreadlocks" (JMH' 97-98 emphasis mine). For the Senegalese's unapologetic and bold impiousness, she can be countenanced from Ujunwa's position who has equally adopted a pugnacious attitude towards Edward and the other participants. Attitudinally the Zimbabwean woman is marked as curbed by an excess because "[s]he *seemed* hyper, overactive, and Ujunwa thought she might like her, but only the way she like alcohol – in small amounts" (JMH' 98). The Kenyan and Tanzanian "*looked ordinary, almost indistinguishable*" and therefore unremarkable in a way that "[s]he *thought* she would like them in the uninvested way that one likes non-threatening people" (JMH' 98 emphasis mine). Of the South African writers present (a white woman and a black man), Ujunwa "wasn't sure" about them but the woman "had too-earnest face, humourless and free of makeup, and the black man looked pious, like a Jehovah's Witness who went from door to door and smiled when each was shut in his face" (JMH' 98). Rather than convey a genuine admission of lack of knowledge, her intimation that she was not sure about them establish a cunning move in Ujunwa's furtive interests in satirical offensive against all present who do not seem



cognizant of the workshop's basis in aesthetic imperialism and gender harassment. The particularly less flattering image of the black South African owes to the fact that as a black man the subject at hand that the narrative explores (white hegemony and machinations) has more adverse implications for him yet he bears a pious temperament rather than an obligatory combativeness, especially with the historical experience of South Africa's white minority's apartheid policy.

Edward's asking Ujunwa to lie down for him as a sexual innuendo symbolically present Ujunwa's apprehension of the workshop organisers' and financiers' intentions as underlain by abuse of their cultural and economic power in nurturing the development of African literary writing. By striving to seize control and define narratives that are supposed to be canonically African, Edward as representative of the British sponsors and supposed connoisseurs of African literature, transgress their midwifery function with regard to development of literary expression in Africa. Instructively, it is only Ujunwa that takes heightened offence both at Edward's sexual advances and at his prescriptions about what African literary art should entail. If it is considered that the narrative fictionally proffers an African writers' workshop at an incongruous location, under the auspices of an incongruously patronizing white European, then the gravity of this patronizing attitude has been addressed by sexual perversion as a symbolism of abuse of power within global creative industry. The fictional Kenyan writer at the workshop lends credence to this assertion when she tells Ujunwa that "she was angry about more than just Edward" (JMH' 112–13).

In *JMH*, therefore, Adichie proffers not just a literary manifesto at the level of thematic materials, suggesting what Africa fiction ought to be about (to use Tunca's words ("The Danger of a Single Short Story' 78), but it also prescribes a way of seeing that navigates a transnational terrain fraught with a tripartite intersection of vectors, namely imperialism of the Western cultural capital, complacency of the African writer and complicity of the Africa writer. Ujunwa's satiric look at the African writers originates from the confronting look at Edward who bears on the context of the writer's workshop as a putative authority of the African literary art. The fictional narrative (set in Lagos, Nigeria) embedded within the framing metafictional narrative (set in Jumping Monkey Hill resort, Cape Town, South Africa) is used to validate the reality or authenticity of the latter in the face of Edwards aesthetic invalidation of Ujunwa's story derived from lived experience, as Tunca rightly observes ("The Danger of a Single Short Story' 78). I conclude here by aligning this transnational conception of African

writer's focal stance with Abiola Irele's idea of African imagination in reference to the nature of the productive creative force from which a distinctively Africa literary art springs. Akin to the transnational focal stance presented in 'JMH', Irele avers that African imagination "is a *conjunction* of impulses that have been given a unified expression in a body of literary texts" (4) because "literature in Africa does not quite function in the limited national range" (6) but rather emerges from an impulse that is an amalgam of locational perspectives but from the centrality the experiencing writer.

### **Mitigating cross-border shivers: trope of Webpage 'refresh' function and exemplum of 'The Shivering'**

'The Shivering' revolves around growth empathetic friendship between two Nigerians, Ukamaka and Chinedu, living in Princeton, USA. The focal agent is Ukamaka, a woman abandoned by her lover, Udenna, who has relocated to Nigeria. On the other hand, Chinedu, a gay, is undergoing immigrant angst as he is out immigration status and also that he is in a similar love situation as Ukamaka, having been abandoned by his partner, Abidemi, who remains in Nigeria. They are drawn to each other by news of tragic plane crash in Nigeria as well as by the coincidental death in Spain of the country's first lady. The tragedy-ravaged home space thus traverses borders of multiple countries, including Nigeria, the USA and Spain, such that the almost instantaneous convergence of the news of tragedy (made possible by the internet connectivity, telephone and radio) has the two protagonists confused. Each initially believes that the first lady, who had flown to Spain for a "tummy-tuck surgery in preparation for her sixtieth birthday party" (145) had been victim of the plane crash. The convergence of this news has prompted a moment of anxiety and uncertainty for the two characters, even as this is aggravated by their pre-existing rankling memories of unrequited love. At first they are brought together, through Chinedu's bold initiative to go uninvited to Ukamaka's apartment, for the purpose of praying for their mother country. After a short while, where they have deal with fact they are strangers to each other, they discover that they have a lot in common in terms of their love lives, forming a basis for a further entrenchment of the new companionship. At first national calamity back home draws them together in her apartment after which "for a moment she felt close to him" (145). After discovering commonality in their romantic experiences, they open up to each other, in a way that vitally reveals the importance of migrant-migrant communion. The communion proves psychologically and emotionally useful for Chinedu because at the end, Ukamaka's commiserativeness about his precarious

immigrant status “made him smile” (165), a telling sign that she had managed to instill hope in him. However, in this section, this complex psychological and emotional disequilibrium resulting from cross-border separation is seized upon to illuminate the operation of telecommunication as a vital function of transnationalism, especially in facilitating cross-border access to resources with implications on migrants’ realization of emotional and psychological resources while trying to adapt to alien social set ups in host country.

In the short story, appropriation of information and telecommunication infrastructure and language is suitable for elucidating transnational phenomenon, not simply because these have lent intensity to the phenomenon, but also because it operates as metaphor of transnationalism itself. Transnational space, as analogue of cyberspace, relies, among other infrastructures, on the internet that is “a rhizomatic connection of computers [as endpoints on the continuous cyberspace] that span all known spatial boundaries” (Mitra and Wats 485). Conceiving of an internet-connected computer as an endpoint in cyberspace allows for metaphoric approach to a migrant networked to their significant others in their home countries as endpoints in the transnational space. Since an internet-linked computer, at any given time, can hypertextually<sup>14</sup> access an electronic resource at a given remote website, so does a migrant require a particular need (information anchorage, psychological support, social anchorage, among other needs) specifically from contacts at their now remote home country. As a webpage needs constant refreshing to keep it up to date (Alqaaidi 46), so does a migrant need the socio-psychological refreshing, amidst psychological and emotional predicaments, by establishing and remaining in touch with goings-on and significant others at in their home country. Currency and relevance of webpage content as maintained through refreshing function serves as a metaphor seized upon here to demonstrate that through telecommunication (be it through internet, telephone call or postal mail) that facilitates simultaneous crossborder embedding in multiple localities characterised by flux of identity-impinging current affairs, migrants afford a socio-psychological tuning in to such

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<sup>14</sup>In web technology, hypertext refers to a “combination of the fragments of the original flat document together with the connections between those fragments, where each fragment is managed in a *node* and each connection between fragments through a *link*” (Agosti 28 emphasis in the original). Analogically, this evokes the fragmentation and dispersal of sense of home upon migration, but a fragmentation and dispersal that are transnationally interlinked through various channels of information communication technology, as well as transport infrastructure. Analogue for nodes in this context are represented by the human cross-border dispersal, with person maintain mental image of home so that even though dispersal imply separation, cross-border linkages are maintained.

diverse localities, akin to the refresh function on a web page. The metaphor particularly functions in a way that evokes transnationalism's simultaneity of lived experience of locations in multiple countries, without significant time-lapse (Basch et al. 8; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 48).

In 'The Shivering' the protagonists, Ukamaka, and her compatriot, Chinedu, are gripped by a heightened uncertainty following the reported plane crash in Nigeria, the same day that Nigeria's first lady dies in Spain. The protagonist also suspects that her former lover, to whom she is still attached, was aboard the ill-fated plane. From the fervour with which Chinedu resorts to prayer, in which "he covered things with the blood of Jesus, he bound up demons and cast them in the sea [and] battled spirits" (143) in a "voice [that] was getting louder, his head bobbing"(144), there is a revealing distress that derives from physical absence from home. At the end of communing in prayer with fellow Nigerian, Ukamaka, there is unmistakable resurgence of ease and equanimity. At the end of the heated prayer session, he cut a figure of an emotionally collected person, as opposed to high-strung figure before the prayer. From the equally apprehensive Ukamaka's perspective, soon after the prayer, "[t]here was something about his demeanor, the way he stood with his arms folded, that made her think of the word 'humble'" (144–45), an indication that the new relationship between them has at least thawed his emotional and psychological uncertainty. Even in the way they commence the formalities of getting to know each other, is revealing of the anxiety that had enveloped them before the prayer communion. They begin introducing themselves at the end rather than the first moment Chinedu enters Ukamaka's apartment, eliciting amusement from the latter: "They shook hands, and this amused her because they had only just clasped each other's hands in prayer" (145). By bringing in these formalities of introducing themselves by their names later rather than earlier, amidst the crisis at hand, serve to indicate an emotional and psychological sobering up to the reality that they needed first and foremost such formalities. As for Ukamaka, there is a palpable jitters that is attached to the need to refresh the webpage on which she is keenly following the news of the tragedy. The jitters dissipate when her mother calls her from Nigeria that Udenna, her ex-lover, was not among those in the ill-fated flight in Nigeria. After the phone call she cries out of relief that Udenna was alive:

She quieted herself long enough to tell him [Chinedu] Udenna was fine and then went back into his embrace, surprised by the familiar comfort of it, certain that he instinctively understood her crying from relief of what had not happened and from the melancholy of what could have happened and from the anger of what remained unresolved since Udenna told her, in an ice-cream shop on Nassau Street, that the relationship was over. (147)

Ukamaka suffers the double predicament of a festering unresolved love relationship and of want in information flow between herself at Princeton and her relatives and contacts in Nigeria. Within a short space of time, however, the quandary occasioned by this want of information is resolved through the telephone conversation with her mother. But even after being informed that Udenna was not in the doomed plane, this does not completely bring her anxiety to rest. The fate of the plane and all aboard is yet to be determined and for this reason they are both still pestered by apprehension. However, when she refreshes the webpage she had kept active, it produces a news headline “*All Killed in Nigeria Plane Crash*” (152 italics in the original). Ukamaka reaction is a two-word phrase “No survivors” marks an final acceptance of the fate of the flight as Chinedu exclaims “Father, take control” while “exhaling loudly” and indication that on his part as a religious person he surrenders fate of Nigeria as a whole to God in whom he has all his faith. To mark this resolution emotional and psychological disequilibrium, henceforth their conversation shifts to their philosophising about religion, their romantic past, and ultimately cementing their newfound friendship and companionship. The argument here is that telecommunication, internet and radio channel as avenue for information flow are vital infrastructures that contribute in fostering transnational space. They provide cross-border channels through which migrants in transnational locations obtain variety of resources, including social embedding for support at home, and vital information with far-reaching psychological and emotional import. Information is channelled in a convenient space of time that minimizes psychological and emotional damage that can accrue from dearth of such information. While exploring transnationalism in *Americanah* in subsequent section below, this value of telecommunication as affording the much-needed psychological and emotional revitalisation for Ifemelu as she grapples with arrival in America, will be pertinent.

## **Familial transnationalism**

For our purposes here familial transnational is approached as that family unit (nuclear as well as its extended kin) where members share their a portion or entirety of their lifetimes apart from each, separated by national borders yet maintaining a sense of familial belonging (Bryceson and Vuorela cited in Bryceson 2). Three short stories, namely “Tomorrow is Too Far”, ‘Arrangers of Marriage’ and ‘Imitation’ locate transnational phenomenon within the fabric of the family. These narratives reach into the less agreeable possibilities of inhabiting transnational locations where members of the family

unit is dispersed to disparate global locations or are brought together in a specific locale through operations of transnational processes. The stories locate the family institution, and the processes that go into its formation, in transnational environments, consequently problematizing the norm that the family is necessarily located geographically (Mazzucato and Schans 704) or that family union is based on “co-residence” and “physical co-presence” (Fesenmyer no page).

‘Tomorrow is Too Far’ spins from the turning-point event of “the last summer [the authorial-figural persona] spent in Nigeria” (‘Tomorrow’ 187) that pivotally mark a moment in this protagonist’s life where she begins to notice, though not with full comprehension, the significant changes in relationship between her parents. It is also at this moment that she begins to grasp the distinct difference in the way she and her brother, Nonso, and her cousin, Dozie, are treated by their mother and grandmother. This particular summer becomes the reference point for her recollections which either predate or postdate this critical juncture. The conflict is complicated by the paradoxical functioning of transnationalism, on one face presenting as a potentially unifying force and, on the other, as fraught with forces that can potentially sunder the family. Structurally, children born out of familial union between two nationals, as is the case in the short story, inhabit space between the two worlds of their parents, thus acting as bridging functions between the parents’ disparate worlds. In the story, the children play this role through their shuttling between America and Nigeria as well as through telephone contact that they necessitate between their mother based in America and their grandmother based in Nigeria. Even at the moment when relations between two is strained, the children act as a buffering and link that keep them together. Out of cultural needs, Grandmama has to establish a close attachment to Nonso since he is “her son’s only son, the one who would carry on the Nnabuisi name” (‘Tomorrow’ 188). By this cultural need for the grandson, patrilineal practice is becomes located within transnational matrix since the subject centred in propagation of the patriarch’s name is born of an American mother. When Nonso falls from the avocado tree and dies, the protagonist sees registered in Grandmama’s face an impression that “she [Grandmama] and your mother were united” (‘Tomorrow’ 190) by the fate of this child. Whereas Grandmama is said to have “never liked your mother”, nonetheless both are united by the need to ensure Nonso’s welfare, each for different reasons.

On the other hand, as analysis of the narrative will indicate, the two worlds of the parents are steeped in incongruent “unyielding and stable structures”(Skrbiš 231) that threatens integrity of the familial union, even despite the unifying role of the children. It is essentially the fixed ways of seeing determined by the discursive structures prevailing in Nigeria (as they are visible in the attitudes of the focaliser’s grandmother to boy-child and girl-child) and those in America (made evident in the focaliser’s mother’s orientation to the same gender distinctions) that pushes the protagonist into committing what she believes would salvage her existence and survival. In Nigerian end of the authorial-figural focaliser’s transnational location, patrilineal imperatives exhibited by her grandmother appear to her (the unnamed authorial-figural persona) in her in-between location as a consistent with how her mother treats her. Though the mother’s differential conduct towards the protagonist does not present in terms of patrilinealism, it has the same fundamental effect of engendering a feeling that her status, relative to Nonso’s, is problematic. While she fully understands that she has better capabilities than her brother, her “Grandmama let only your brother Nonso climb the trees to shake a loaded branch, although you [the protagonist] were a better climber than he was” (“Tomorrow’ 187). She also does not miss to note that as Grandmama gave out coconut milk to children including the authorial-figural persona, her brother was always given priority but confusingly to the girl, generosity rang in Grandmama’s acts because “[e]verybody got a sip of the wind-cooled milk, even the children from down the street who came to play” (“Tomorrow’ 188). Grandmama makes her understand that girls ought not be taught how to pluck coconuts because, simply, “girls never plucked coconuts” and Nonso always received preferential treatment because he “was her son’s only son, the one who would carry on the Nnabuisi name, while Dozie was only a *mwadiana*, her daughter’s son” (“Tomorrow’ 188). Likewise there is evidence that the protagonist’s mother harbours a partiality for Nonso, as this is revealed by the narrating bit of the tripartite self:

When she [her mother] went into Nonso’s room to say goodnight, she always come out laughing that laugh. Most times, you pressed your palms to your ears to keep the sound out, and kept the palms pressed to your ears even when she came into your room to say Good night, darling, sleep well. She never left your room with that laugh. (“Tomorrow’ 190)<sup>15</sup>

Though she has not mustered the full meaning of what is going on around and about her, she is nonetheless internally tormented by what on the surface appear as jealousy towards Nonso who is

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<sup>15</sup> The “laugh” in question is referred to in the preceding passage: “It [the mother’s crying] made you think of her laugh, a *ho-ho-ho* laugh that started inside her belly and did not soften as it came up” (“Tomorrow’ 190).



favoured in the two worlds they inhabit but which, as revealed above, hacks back to the socially marginalized female gender as the work of adults. The fact that she has to plug her ears with her palms every night she hears her mother gaily bid her brother good night, and only flatly doing so for her, serves as sufficient revelation of internal agony she is enduring as a young girl who does not yet comprehend her problematic position in the society as a girl.

In terms of focalisation, 'Tomorrow is Too Far' adopts juvenile perspective marked in the narrative by attention to superficiality of the focalising protagonist's situation and a characteristic lack of interpretive capacity to understand this situation. As far as we are concerned as readers her problems derive gender marginalization but she is incapable of comprehending her bleak lot in terms of this marginalisation. When she questions Grandmama about why Nonso is always given priority, the explanation she is given, she fails to perceive what is glaringly demeaning to her as a girl and to Dozie as a daughter's son:

It was the summer you asked Grandmama why Nonso sipped first even though Dozie was thirteen, a year older than Nonso, and Grandmama said Nonso was her son's only son, the one who would carry on the Nnbuisi name, while Dozie was only *mvadiana*, her daughter's son. It was the summer you found the molt of a snake on the lawn, unbroken and sheer like see-through stockings.... ('Tomorrow' 188)

The sharp transition from a Grandmama's revealing response to her inquiry, to the unrelated subject of finding a snake's sloughed-off skin indicate an inability to digest the response because of juvenile mental caprice. An additional index of juvenility is the way we are made to perceive her sex organ and sexual intercourse while they experiment on their sexuality with Dozie: "... he was ten and you were seven and you both wiggled into the tiny space behind Grandmama's garage and he tried to fit what you both called his "banana" into what you both called your "tomato" but neither of you was sure which was the right hole"('Tomorrow' 188 quotations in the original). Sexual intercourse is simplistically portrayed as an act of fitting something into something else only understood, again simplistically, as a hole.

As a young girl, therefore, having to contend with adverse gender environment, jealousy becomes a reflex reaction to this marginalisation, which though it results in the death of her brother, nonetheless contributes in discursive establishment of empathy for her state of affairs. Through her eyes, at a tragic milestone of self-realization, her problem lies in what she perceives as perfection of her brother's body



that endears him to their mother and grandmother, an existential threat that she resolves should be neutralised. In a self-address, she reveals that:

That summer, eighteen years ago, was the summer of your first self-realization. The summer you knew that something had to happen to Nonso, so that you could survive. Even at ten you knew that some people can take up too much space by simply being, that by existing, some people can stifle others.... that you needed Nonso to get hurt – maybe maim him, maybe twist his legs. You wanted to mar the perfection of his lithe body, to mae him less lovable, less able to do all that he did. Less able to take up your space. ('Tomorrow' 195)

As a child innocent of the imperatives of complex transnational identification orders that attend her life, split between two of what Skrbiš terms unyielding and stable structures, there exists a less questionable way of establishing order that she perceives is upset in her world. In her perceptual processes, while regarding the discrepant treatments they receive from Grandmama and their mother, the most obvious norm by which she would expect them to be treated is by consideration of age relations (seniority or juniority) and practical aptitude. In Grandmama's preference for Nonso's climbing trees, she in the deep recesses of her consciousness, she expects that being more apt a climber than her brother, Grandmama should prefer her. As she is not chosen for the task, however, she lets this pass without lingering on the inconsistency. From the narrative, this non-lingering is consistent with juvenile mental capacity, capable of noting such inconsistencies but incapable of perceiving its injurious discursivity, and thus cannot mobilise a plan of counter-action. Therefore she is put in front of us as we witness her endure the vagaries of male-privileging discourses. Adichie deliberately sets up the juvenile perspective (that attributes gender marginalization to bodily wholesomeness) as a descant<sup>16</sup> to the detrimental, fixed adult valuation of genders. This perspectival counterpoint not only highlights the psychological torment that the girl has to go through, but also puts into focus patrilineal imperatives and parental gender partiality undermining the place and self-worth of the girl-child. Through portrayal of consistency of what the girl-child has to endure in the transnational space, Adichie raises attention to the fact that female marginalisation is transnational in formation and that this assumes different discursive forms in different localities. As seen in the short story, it manifests in Nigeria as patrilineal discourse of while in America it saturates the domestic space as favouritism. Riding on this opportunity to illustrate transnational marginal femalehood, Adichie also point to the importance of those individuals transnationally located, both in revealing the transnational nature of

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<sup>16</sup> I appropriate the term descant from the discipline of Music where it suggests a higher pitched melodic line composed or performed above another melodic line.

this marginalisation as well as in possibly providing location for debunking marginalisation. The narrative adopts the focal angle of a young girl as a rhetorical device to ramp up our empathy, more so through the address function of the second person narrative perspective. As the young girl naively suffers through constructions and attitudes that serve power interests of adults (particularly of males), we are located in her place by the address function of ‘you’ pronoun that though it may refer to protagonist, tangentially implicate an implied reader supposed in the second person pronoun.

Whereas ‘Tomorrow is Too Far’ foregrounds the problematic of children upbringing in transnational milieu, ‘Imitation’ illuminates perceived gender and class augmentations attached to transnational dislocation of family members. One premise by which transnational tag applies to emergent questions in ‘Tomorrow is Too Far’ is the involvement of two nationals in marital union and the attendant complications accruing from dissimilar worldly orientations that impinge both on children, the parents and the extended family members. ‘Imitation’ centres marriage partners of the same nationality but continentally dispersed as an integral process in establishing “gendered geographies of power” (Pessar and Mahler 818) that traverse original homeland (Nigeria) and adopted homeland (America). Pessar and Mahler introduce the concept of gendered geographies of power to convey the idea that not only are transnational locations critical in articulating gender, but also that one’s existing socialized identity (in terms of gender and class) intersect with diverse geographic scales (e.g. local, metropolitan, rural, urban) in ways that they shape agency and/or subjectivity (815–18; see also Mahler et al. 101). This is because, as Pessar and Mahler put it again, “border crossings initiate [migrants] into new power hierarchies” (822; see also Mahler et al. 101) whether this exposure to those new power hierarchies is direct (because the impacted is immigrant) or indirect (if the impacted is a stayer). Differential relations between geographic scales and its intersection with diverse planes of identification re-configure subjectivity and agency in diverse ways “so that same person may be privileged locally while marginalized transnationally or vice-versa” (Mahler et al. 101). Movement to America is registered more as Obiora’s initiative than a decision that is mutually reached between himself and his wife, Nkem. As she details how she ended up living in America, it is evident that she has no say in many things that have direct impact on her life, including her reproductive life, but pliantly goes with what Obiora prefers. When at the end of the narrative she comes out to firmly demand they return to Nigeria, it is reported that:

... he [Obiora] has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand. She wonders vaguely if that is what attracted him to her in the first place, that she deferred to him, that she let him speak for both of them. ('Imitation' 41)

This portrays Nkem as a human accessory in Obiora's pursuit of enhanced stature as Nigerian man since he controls the distribution of family members in the transnational space and also that there is an understood common sense that a woman is exclusively a child-rearer. In this context, child-bearing is conflated with child-rearing, thus "they never decided that she would stay with the children .... It just happened" ('Imitation' 26). This implies that her being left to raise that child is a matter of course and, like the curious pattern she sees in Obiora's preference to stay back in Nigeria, "she said nothing" ('Imitation' 25–27). Obiora and his wife are subjects of a discursive regime of power hierarchies differentially operating in the two ends of transnational space. The regime given prominence is that in operation in Nigeria, orthographically captured in the satirically prolonged phrases "Rich Men Who Sent Their Wives to America to Have Babies league" and "Rich Nigerian Men Who Owned Houses in America league" ('Imitation' 26) which through key word capitalisation reify the masculine bent of the prevailing regulatory regimen.

The short story does not just present imperatives of single identifier axis as operating in a unitary manner to foment transnationalism. Objective of class identification works in intersectional relation with the other axis of identification presented in the narrative (gender) in a way that it makes vital not only to establish locally but also simultaneously across borders of the two countries as a condition for enhancing class and gender identities (Mahler et al. 101). To use the words of Pessar and Mahler, gender aspirations "articulates transnationally with other modes of identity" (815) one of which is foregrounded in 'Imitation' as class. 'Imitation' takes the converse of the control relation in the assertion that "gender controls options available to individuals and to groups, determining who stays and who moves – how often, when, where and why" (Pessar and Mahler 823). Instead, it portrays transnationalism as a phenomenon that can be seized upon in Nigeria so as to further reinforce one's gender claims. Because of gender locations in Nigeria, it is predetermined who moves and who stays, and respectively, why. Obiora, Nkem's husband, is a reputed "Big Man" ('Imitation' 40) back in Nigeria, and is "listed as one of Fifty Influential Nigerian Businessmen" ('Imitation' 27), securing him both a middle class identity in the class-conscious country and secure masculine stature. In terms of gender, Obiora instates Nkem in America because he has to situate his masculinity in Nigeria as Big

Man rather than in America which “does not recognize Big Men. Nobody says “Sir! Sir!” to them .... Nobody rushes to dust their seats before they sit down” (‘Imitation’ 28–29). As the eldest daughter, “it shamed her, even more than frustrated her, that she could not do any of the things expected of the First Daughter” (‘Imitation’ 31). Nkem is under pressure to provide for her parents and siblings through the man she lives with, whether as wife or as concubine. This pressure sees her go to any length including dating married men which is conveyed as an expectation of every “single girl in Lagos” (‘Imitation’ 31). She is also expected to conform to the image of Big Man’s wife, as indeed Obiora reminds her: “Long hair is more graceful on a Big Man’s wife”(‘Imitation’ 40), alluding to an established cosmetic requirement for women of men whose masculinity is standardised as Big Man. On the other hand Big Man image, as can be attested to by that of Obiora, is a configuration of male qualities, namely possession of wealth, privileged positioning in the business world that taps into lucrative government contracts, and most importantly having a beautiful wife and offspring located away in the metropolitan West.

From the narrative, there is glamour in the Obioras Nigeria to enhance class identity and the possibility of venturing into transnational location presents an apt avenue to give a new dimension to this class claims. By settling his wife and children in sub-urban Philadelphia, while himself remaining in Nigeria, he not only further boosts this identity to conform to “the coveted league, the Rich Nigerian Men Who Sent Their Wives to America to Have Their Babies league” (‘Imitation’ 26), but this also circumstantially revises upwards Nkem’s socio-economic status (as wife to Obiora) into a life she has “never imagined” (‘Imitation’ 27). In this context, parturition (as will also become evident in *Americanah*) is not just a biological event but attaches to processes of social class construction when the question of where this event occurs become pertinent. America is invariably constructed in Adichie’s migrant’s imaginations in terms that Ifemelu, the protagonist in *Americanah* fittingly renders as a “hallowed” (*Americanah* 1) place. This hallowed image partly derives from the filtering mechanism that American immigration system serves, as demonstrated in ‘Imitation’ and other of Adichie’s narratives which affirm that for an ordinary, non-wealthy Nigerian to enter America they have to contend with ‘condescending questions at the American embassy’ (‘Imitation’ 37).<sup>17</sup> If middle class identity, like the case of the wealthy league of Nigerian men that Nkem refers to, is affirmed by

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<sup>17</sup> In *Americanah* Obinze only ultimately manages to secure American Visa after he has grown wealthy.

establishment in America, therefore, this Nigerian migrant's destination achieves its hallowed status because its regulatory system permits only those already perceived in Nigeria as occupying hallowed class locations. Cross-border embedding of this family in this perceived hallowed American world is further enhanced when Obiora decides to buy the residence Nkem and the children occupy in Philadelphia which is on sale, further raising their status into "the Rich Nigerian Men Who Owned Houses in America league" ('Imitation' 26). In short, the Obioras establish in America not because they lack a place to have their children in Nigeria, nor is it that there is limited space where they can live. Rather, residence and procreation events are dislocated as a way of re-positioning themselves socially in the class- and gender-conscious Nigeria.

Incidentally, however, transnational family members (to the extent they are exposed to differential discourses determining various axes of identity) are awakened to "differences between how axes of differentiation operate at home versus abroad" (Mahler et al. 103), implying that transnationalism carries the potential of facilitating negotiation of modalities of familial transnationalism itself vi-a-vis implicated axes of identity. 'Imitation' presents a negotiation of transnational family life through Nkem's altered way of seeing that adapts the way the story is focalised. If the earlier Nkem, to whom Obiora's infidelity is not yet confirmed by Ijemamaka, is pliable to her husband's decision to settle them in America, the later Nkem recoups her voice that reverberates as an alien echo even within her herself as an emerging agent. When she finally enunciates this voice within their marital union, by revaluing the collective pronoun "we", hitherto a taken-for-granted preserve for Obiora ("she liked it when he said "we", as though she really had a say in it" ('Imitation' 26)) her husband stares in consternation just as she listens to herself with astonishment:

"We have to find a school for Adanna and Okey in Lagos." She had not planned to say it, but it seems right, it is what she has always wanted to say.

Obiora turns to stare at her. "What?"

"We are moving back at the end of the school year. We are moving back to live in Lagos. We are moving back." She speaks slowly, *to convince herself as well*. Obiora continues to stare at her and she knows that he has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand. ('Imitation' 41)

She even begins mentally to question the foundations of their marital relationship: "She wonders vaguely if that [pliability to Obiora's decisions] is what attracted him to her in the first place"

(‘Imitation’ 41). Though this is not voiced, together with the fact that “[s]he stresses the “we” (‘Imitation’ 41) when she makes the bold statement of returning as a family to Lagos (“We can spend holidays here, together” (‘Imitation’ 41)) this serves as an index emergent agency facilitated by transnational dislocation. This agency plays out in her demand to be involved in decision making within domestic sphere, asserting that “I want to know when a new houseboy is hired in my house” (‘Imitation’ 42), a demand that can also be seen as an oblique and sarcastic reference to her husband’s bringing of his mistress to their home in Lagos. Her agency always manifests in her negotiation for a transnational life in which integrity of family union through co-residence is privileged. To her a more preferable transnational life would be where they would all have America as their holiday destination but maintaining co-residence in Lagos.

While ‘Tomorrow is Too Far’ and ‘Imitation’ present families which are already constituted as they cope with liminal transnational locations, ‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ approaches transnationalism as it pertains to gender expectations and family life from the perspective of processes that go into establishing the family institution. The short story brings to sharp focus the culture of arranging marriages necessitated by migrant transnationalism that has resulted in dispersal of marriageable partners, reconfiguring a practice that is traditionally a geography-bound communal practice.

Through cross-border exchange of photographs Uncle Ike and Ofodile’s mother in Nigeria redefine the conduct of this traditional practice of arranging marriages between “virtual strangers” (National Research Council 39) as made necessary by dispersal beyond national borders of ethnically and communally related partners rather than necessitated by local patriarchal calculations. Unspecified prejudices about American women is impressed into Uncle Ike’s report that Ofodile’s mother “was very concerned that he [Ofodile] would marry an American woman” (‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ 170). Ofodile’s mother’s quest to have her son maintain ethnic integrity through marrying an Igbo woman that meets descriptions of idealised Igbo wife (“god girl, quiet” and “virgin” (‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ 184)) demonstrates that Igbo identity is no longer a geographically circumscribed entity but one traversing the space between Nigeria and America, thriving as a community “without propinquity” (Faist, ‘Transnational Social Spaces out of Migration’ 196). Ofodile’s faculties of reproduction as vital in maintaining Igbo identity, even despite lack of propinquity, exhibits the necessary re-adaptation of ways of furthering Igbo nation in the emergent transnational space

effectively rendering it in terms that Benedict Anderson refers to as imagined community (6) that exists without propinquity.

With regard to gender expectations in the context of marriage partnership, ‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ highlights masculinity’s fissured values (insistence for virginity of gendered other yet not observing it himself), and vulnerability of the woman subject especially within the institution of marriage that materialises from transnational space. The narrative illustrates that this subjecthood is exacerbated by risks and uncertainties of this transnational space. Despite prominence given to this risks and uncertainties, however, the narrative ends on a note that proffers the same transnational space as inherently attended by affordances for realization of woman’s agency. Whereas Ofodile as a man is positioned to better exploit opportunities offered by the two worlds across which his life spans, Chinasa initially manifest a vulnerability associated with her being subject of patriarchy in Nigeria. Ofodile’s American location, within which he is embedded through a strategic sham paper marriage to an American woman, is auspicious for the development of his career as a medical doctor. Implication of America as a more prestigious place to acquire medical qualification is evident in Uncle Ike and Aunt Ada’s sense of triumph at facilitating the marriage between Chinasa and Ofodile. Emeka Udenwa, who is working in America as a medical intern, Uncle Ike proudly registers this as an achievement both for them as guardians and for Chinasa:

“A doctor in America,” he said, beaming. “What could be better? Ofodile’s mother was looking for a wife for him .... I gave her a photo of you. I did not hear from her for while and I thought they had found someone. But ...” Uncle Ike let his voice trail away, let his beaming get wider.

....  
“What have we not done for you? We raise you as our own and then we find you an *ezigbo* *di*! A doctor in America! It is like we won a lottery for you!” Aunt Ada said. (‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ 170)

Their regard for their managing to securing Ofodile’s hand in marriage with Chinasa carry the double meaning that Ofodile is not only highly prized because of his American location that enhances his stature as a marriageable bachelor,<sup>18</sup> but also because he is American-trained doctor. The fact that he lives in America and is training to be a doctor there is critical in augmenting his stature in the eyes of those in Nigeria, which indeed sees him easily get a marriage partner (Chinasa) there. He is referred to

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<sup>18</sup> “*ezigbo di*” means “a good a husband” in Igbo language



as “guinea fowl’s egg” for whom Nigerian “women would offer both eyes” (“The Arrangers of Marriage’ 184) for his hand in marriage. Because of this he exploits the opportunities offered by his transnational location. Whereas he exploits the good esteem he enjoys back home as a man who is looking to secure his masculinity by marrying a docile woman (revealingly, he hints that he settled for Chinasa because she was “good girl, quiet,” that she “might be a virgin” and was of lighter skin colour because as he says “[i] had to think about my children’s looks” as “[l]ight-skinned blacks fare better in America” (“The Arrangers of Marriage’ 184). On the other hand Chinasa is disadvantaged in Nigeria because she is described both as an orphan and as a woman. She has no say in choice of her marriage partner, this being left to Uncle Ike who takes the initiative to give her photo to Ofodile’s mother. As an orphan she is overworked and denied educational opportunity by her guardians but she has kept this to herself:

I had thanked them both for everything – finding me a husband, taking me into their home, buying me a new pair of shoes every two years. It was the only way to avoid being called ungrateful. I did not remind them that I wanted to take the JAMB exam again and try for the university, that while going to secondary school I had sold more bread in Auntie Ada’s bakery than all other bakeries in Enugu sold, that furniture and floors in the house shone because of me. (“The Arrangers of Marriage’ 170)

But in what reveals the emancipating potential of migrancy, her movement to her America, despite the unravelling of her expectations, in sum she musters her subjecthood through interaction, advice and encouragement from a fellow woman, Nia, a liberal African America woman. Nia’s hard-boiled attitude by which she wants to foster a “fucking positive” atmosphere to enable Chinasa find her bearing, is instrumental in the formation of a similar attitude in Chinasa. Nia’s advice that she bides her time with Ofodile as she works to legitimise her immigrant status puts her on a path to independence:

“You can wait until you get your papers and then leave,” Nia said. “You can apply for benefits while you get your shit together, and then you’ll get a job and find a place and support yourself and start afresh. This is the U.S. of fucking A., for God’s sake.”

Nia came and stood beside me, by the window. She was right, I could not leave yet. I went back across the hall the next evening. I rang the doorbell and he opened the door, stood aside, and let me pass.

Chinasa’s being married off to a man in the U.S. whom she has never met, proves auspicious in placing her in an environment crucial for her liberation as a woman. Notwithstanding the frustrations she gets in being married off to him, she achieves an agency evident in her emergent calculative attitude (manifest



in the fact that she “could not leave *yet*”) as she resolves to remain with Ofodile, probably as follows the path suggested by Nia to wait till she got her immigration status formalised after which, as she advises, she could find a job and work for her independence from Ofodile.

The narrative adopts the standpoint of Chinasa Agatha Okafor, an orphan brought up under guardianship of Uncle Ike and Auntie Ada. Out of generic expedience, given the limited space of the short story, the narrative begins *in medias res* as Chinasa and her new husband, Ofodile Emeka Udenwa walk to the apartment where the latter lives at Flatbush neighbourhood in Brooklyn, having just arrived from Lagos. Unlike in ‘Imitation’ in which the focalising protagonist’s subjectivity and subsequent agency unfolds in a linear manner, the specific temporal standpoint in ‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ is the afterward of experience of meeting the new husband and moving to America. The use of “my new husband” (‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ 167) as the first words of the very first narrative statement (and used extensively throughout the narrative) to refer to Ofodile carries a tinge of sarcasm betraying the sense that the focalising agent already knows he is not new a husband because he is in a legal but sham marriage with an American woman. if indeed Chinasa believes she has “won a lottery” by being married to Ofodile, as a matter of logic she would have to refer to him with more deference as *my husband* without any need to qualify that he was new. But “my new husband” has a double implication in this context. First, but invalid possibility is that Chinasa would be implying Ofodile is new husband because she had a previous one. This is unlikely because from the direct speech of her guardians there is a clear impression that with Ofodile, Chinasa has got herself her first husband just after coming of age: “.... We raise you as our own and then we find you an *ezigbodi*! A doctor in America! It is like we won a lottery for you!” Auntie Ada said” (‘The Arrangers of Marriage’ 170). Auntie Ada gives the impression that there is an uninterrupted progression from being raised as a young girl to being a marriageable young woman and then to being the betrothed. The possibility that she is suggesting her marital commitment to Ofodile is her second marriage is thus unlikely. The second and most consistent implication of the reference “my new husband” is that Chinasa has a foreknowledge Ofodile’s first marriage and therefore that she refers to him tongue-in-cheek that he has no prior commitment to any another woman as a husband. Report of Ofodile’s prohibitions of Chinasa’s use of Igbo language in public and at home, her use of Nigerian English dialect, and of the moment she discovers Ofodile’s aliases and past sexual and marital life are also presented as shockingly hilarious but with a degree of buoyancy:

"I am not called Ofodile here, by the way. I go by Dave," he said...

"Dave?" I knew he didn't have an English name. The invitation cards to our wedding had read *Ofodile Emeka Udenwa and Chinaza Agatha Okafor*.

"The last name I use here is different too. Americans have a hard time with Udenwa, so I changed it."

"What is it?" I was still trying to get used to Udenwa, a name I had known only a few weeks.

"It's Bell."

"Bell!" I had heard about Waturuocha that changed to Waturu in America, a Chikelugo that took the more American-friendly Chikel, but Udenwa to Bell? "That's not even close to Udenwa," I said. ("The Arrangers of Marriage" 172)

Shock at the possibility of Ofodile's false identity last only through brief reaction encapsulated in her utterance of the name Dave, after which there is a diversionary recall of what she is more certain about (certainty that he did not have an English name) and of a more pleasant wedding event as if to attenuate the bitter truth of the duplicity she has just been entrapped in. When Ofodile reveals his last name as he is known in America, Bell, an act we would expect to cement Chinasa's astonishment at her new husband's identity fraud, her instinctive reaction is a comical mental counterchecking against her own established mode projecting Igbo name transformations in America. Despite the shock value of the unfolding true character of Ofodile, there is no sustained sense of devastation at this developing truth suggesting the focalising agent is either managing or has already found a way of getting on top of this harsh and inauspicious reality. It is this afterwardness of the narrative's standpoint that affords a strategic attack on the various issues the short story raises. First the afterwards standpoint affords a sobriety with which to satirically (rather than acrimoniously) launch an assault on the culture of arranging marriages in the emergent context of the transnational space. Secondly, reflective standpoint allows the strategic distance from acrimony of primary instance when bitter truth is learnt first-hand. As with what this afterwardness facilitates with regard to culture of arranging marriages and woman's precarious position in the transnational space, the interrogatory tone of reflection in the narrative permits a self-mockery because of one's folly of expecting too much especially where one's agency is limited.

## **Ties that bind: Abridging America and Nigeria**

Transnational structures in *Americanah* have nurtured within the domestic space in which Ifemelu develops as a focalising agent. Primarily, *Americanah* is Ifemelu's narrative of growth and mobility from the formative domestic sphere, mainly structured by parental, religious and societal expectations, to an outside world in which she has to contend with oppressive social and economic forces. The novel

does not, however, merely present her role as that of one generally contending with such forces but as positioned strive to assert herself as an agent against these societal strictures and structures governing the two worlds (that is Nigeria as her maternal homeland and America as her adopted homeland). As she leaves Nigeria she does not only sacrifice resources that putatively assure her social security (such as parental custodianship and communal amity), but she is plunged into a society in which she has no place other than that of an outsider. Despite this outsider tag, however, she struggles against all the odds to establish agency that is not only significant for her confrontation with alien American world, but also has far-reaching implications for how she would later relate with societal set-ups in her home country.

Several factors within familial space conduce to making it instrumental for establishment, reinforcement and adaptation of social ties for a transnational life. On parental level, her father is instrumental in making it possible for her to join a school largely exclusive to well-to-do, jet-setting families. Ifemelu reveals that her father had worked to ensure she was admitted to a school which, in his own words, “builds both character and career” (*Americanah* 66). Evidently the school he chooses for her had all these traits and the more reason that it was a magnet for children from wealthy background. This school eventually becomes a space for forging future cross-border ties. It is in this school environment where she first meets Ginika, (the daughter of Nigeria father and African-American mother) between whom durable friendship (tried and tested by their competition for a romantic partner, Obinze) develops. Ifemelu’s most trusted confidant on arrival in America is Ginika who, because of her mother’s American citizenship had earlier moved to and established themselves in America. It is Ginika who would be Ifemelu’s first saviour when she goes through a post-traumatic stress after sexual encounter with the tennis coach at Admore, America, that takes her to a suicidal brink. In the same school she meets Obinze who would later provide her with psychological anchorage and bearing by means of telephone and email contact, between Nigeria and America, as she goes through first-time navigation of American world. On the other hand, religion presents itself as an instrumental factor from which her assertive attitude is grafted, an attitude that would be handy later in her bold challenge to normalised race relations in America. In the way her mother’s unpredictable denominationalism and the Catholic dogmatist, Sister Ibinabo’s ultra-conservative Catholicism are focalised through Ifemelu, there is unmistakable impatience towards religious dogma and orthodoxy

vis-à-vis political corruption in Nigeria as she perceives these as working in sympathy with each other. As long as religion remains within its limits as religion, this is tolerable for Ifemelu:

Ifemelu was uninterested in church, indifferent about making any religious effort, perhaps because her mother already made so much. Yet her mother's faith comforted her; it was in her mind, a white cloud that moved benignly above her head as she moved. Until The General came into their lives. (*Americanah* 44)

However, threshold of tolerance for religious dogma and orthodoxy is surpassed when this assume the function of sanitising inanities of masculinity (as in the case of The General's annexing of Aunt Uju (Ifemelu's aunt and confidant, and who lives with them as a household) as his concubine (but seen by Ifemelu's mother as godsend and that "... God [was] really using him in people's lives" (*Americanah* 45)) and political fraud (as in the case of Sister Ibinabo's lionised political figure of Chief Omenka whom Ifemelu sees as a "419" man (*Americanah* 51)).<sup>19</sup>Ifemelu's streak of impatience at this junction between religion and political and patriarchal hypocrisy reveals in her audacious standing up to Sister Ibinabo, firmly refusing to honour what appears to her as social deviance by garlanding Chief Omenka, a 419 figure, in the name of religious piety. Within the domestic space, her mother has a significant command over both Ifemelu and her father, so that when she switches denominations they too effect some change in their religious orientation, but mostly with the objective of assuring her (the mother's) own mental integrity. For this reason religion at home is seen more as a "white cloud that moved benignly above her head as she moved". Ifemelu's impatience towards religion is thus tempered by her concern for her mother's mental integrity that seem to her to assured by religion. This need on her side to tolerate her mother's shifting denominationalism engenders in her a discursive sense of superior command over her destiny unlike the mother who constantly attributes their destiny to religious and superstitious forces. For instance, the possibility of appreciating truth is pegged to supernatural revelations as the case where "a blazing appearance near the gas cooker of an angel holding a book trimmed in red thread" reveals to her the demonic character of her former pastor (*Americanah* 43). Prosperity is also subject to the whims of supernatural forces, as this is clear from her copious prayers to ward off evil spirits and for the intervention of a benign deity: "God, my heavenly father, I command you to fill this day with blessing and prove to me that you are God! I am waiting on you for my prosperity! Do not let the evil one win, do not let my enemies triumph over me!"

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<sup>19</sup>The narrative makes a direct reference to 419, Nigeria's code-name for criminal act of obtaining a benefit through false pretence (see Chawki 2–3; and Longe et al. 125).

(*Americanah* 43). Ifemelu's acquiescence to her mother's religious practices is more an effort to humour her rather than as sign of religious fellowship, even at times managing with great effort, despite herself, to perform this indulgent gesture, for she "would mumble something nonsensical instead of saying "Amen"" (*Americanah* 45). Religious persuasion of her mother thus splits her between standing up to challenge religious orthodoxy and tolerance of the same. This sense that she is in command of her destiny is to serve her well during the critical moment of establishing a space for herself as African woman in America.

Ifemelu's brazen confrontation of the revered Sister with fact of the church's collaboration with the corrupt prompts her mother to utter that "it would be better if she [Ifemelu] was a boy, behaving like this [confronting the Sister]" (*Americanah* 52), elicits questions about social expectations of girls and women vis-à-vis boys and men. In the eyes of her mother, this rebelliousness or being "troublemaker" conforms to, and is acceptable with, being a boy as opposed to being a girl. It is this streak for contestation, troublemaking repute and nonconformity that endears her to Obinze because in loving her despite the troublemaker tag she came to accept herself as such (a troublemaking woman) and to use this "self-affection" to negotiate for her space. This effectively lines her up for Obinze's lasting psychological and philosophical influence on her as she experiences and negotiates a transnational space later in her life while in America and when she returns to Nigeria. It is also this nonconformity as a woman, constructed early enough in the narrative, that would subsequently be her resource in negotiating for her place as a black female migrant in America, upsetting normalised prejudices about Africa and Africans (especially through the blog, *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black* that she establishes to stir silenced and stiff race relation in America). Her race does not deter her from entering into romantic relation with a man (Curt) considered ideally white, despite racial expectations to align with one's race in romantic choice. In a reflexive evaluation of this tendency in her personality, she comes to view it as an instinctive self-preservation strategy: "She had always liked this image of herself as too much trouble, as different, and she sometimes thought of it as a carapace that kept her safe" (*Americanah* 60).

Along with the social force of the gender structuring of her domestic environment as a critical ingredient in transnational positioning, is the social expectation that her parents accord hospitality to

relatives. Her father's obligation to kinship ties is germinative of transnational social structure that would subsequently benefit him and others within that structure:

Growing up, Ifemelu did not feel like an only child because of the cousins, aunts and uncles who lived with them. There were always suitcases and bags in the flat; sometime a relative or two would sleep on the floor of the living room for weeks. Most were her father's family, brought to Lagos to learn a trade or go to school or look for a job, so that the people back in the village would not mutter about their brother with only one child who did not want to help raise others. (*Americanah* 53)

The domestic space, courtesy of kinship imperatives, thus presents itself as a route and a nodal point facilitating local and, eventually, transnational mobility. Consequently, Aunt Uju, as a critical cross-border link, is produced from the interaction between this kinship obligation as custodianship, and the fortuitous encounter she has with the army General who appropriates her as a kept woman. Ifemelu's father provides sustenance and custodianship to Aunt Uju, leading to her subsequently joining university for medical training. However, with an adverse economic environment, it means that Aunt Uju does not easily find employment, ultimately accepting to live as the army General's concubine in exchange of which she receives social and economic security, albeit short-lived. But The General keeps her primarily out of the excess of his male ego. Since her concubinage is tied to The General's patriarchal appropriation of women as markers of male prestige and virility, her maternity provides further cause for bolstering this male ego by having her deliver her baby in America, a birthing arrangement that is meant to highlight his prestige. Whereas The General's decision to have the child delivered abroad augurs well with his male ego, Aunt Uju incidentally sees an opportunity to claim American citizenship for the child and, by extension, for herself. This settling as a concubine, however, eventually leaves her in a precarious position as The General is killed in a plane crash after which, as a result of hostility from his relatives, she is compelled to emigrate to America. This way she becomes a contact point in America, establishing an American anchorage that makes it possible a transnational circuitry instrumental for Ifemelu's own mobility, her parents' visit to her in America. As the child born of The General and Aunt Uju, Dike, grows and develops an awareness of his different identity in America, this transnational connectivity gains in complexity with Dike's interstitial location (neither Nigerian by dint of social ecology in which grows, nor American by virtue of parentage). In this location as a first generation immigrant in America, Dike's familial structure becomes dispersed across transnational space, and has to shuttle between here and there (lodged

between America and Nigeria) in order not only to meet his relatives but most importantly so as to recoup the transnationally dispersed ingredients organising his identity.

However, Aunt Uju's role is not limited to her own capacity as a woman expelled into a cross-border life course. Her presence in Ifemelu's home is also important in shaping the latter's consciousness, as a young girl, concerning practicalities and essentials of womanhood, supplementing her mother's religiosity, for most memorably for Ifemelu, Uju "talked her through her first menstrual period, supplementing her mother's lecture that was full of biblical quotes about virtue but lacked useful details about cramps and pads" (*Americanah* 54). Ifemelu also reminisces that Aunt Uju introduced her to literature on women fashion, sex and sexuality, and home remedies to woman's image needs. Aunt Uju, therefore, introduces to Ifemelu the pragmatics of being a woman in a patriarchal universe. However, having been set up in the narrative as nonconformist and questioning of the values she receives, Ifemelu later subjects to scrutiny the foundations of Uju's life practicalities, an attitudinal pattern that would inform her relations with others while in America, such as the Turners (for whom she does babysitting as her first employment in America) as she becomes more firmly established in her transnational location. This disruptive role is also reflected in her American blog that generally work to defamiliarise the invisible but pervasive racial configuration of American society.

In *Americanah*, therefore, the domestic sphere is a ground for nurturing social relations and essential personal attributes crucial in establishing cross-border social structures. Transnational dispersal of members of Ifemelu's household is salutary in formation of transnational contact points, just as her ethical stance of speaking out grows from cross-cutting parental, religious and philosophical vectors within her family environment.

Aside from the role that the school has in shaping her personality, however, school also acts as a space where vital ties that would be transnationally significant are established. In school she earns herself fame and "was always on every party list," in addition to which she was also academically of repute (66). Coming from a humble family background in a school dominated by those from evidently wealthier ones, she makes up for this humble upbringing through academic excellence and through her being socially endearing. For this she wins the friendship of Ginika, a fellow schoolmate distinguished for her prettiness. She wins Obinze's unqualified love, as well as the admiration of a number of other male students. Ginika and Ifemelu would vie for a romantic relationship with Obinze,



but the former cedes it to her friend and, though each is upset by this discomfiting win-loss, their friendship survives it, even becoming a bridge and orienting resource for Ifemelu on managing to move to the US. However, not all these relations in the school environment are based on an authentic social positioning. Emenike, with an overwhelming and alienating sense of outsidership arising from his wish to belong to the coterie of jet-setters (also code-named Big Guys), forges his own narrative of princely background, which is debunked by the embarrassing appearance of his impoverished father in school. He claims social parity especially with the socially high-flying Kayode DaSilva, a position he uses to claim ties with the latter and the rest of the Big Guys. Emenike's relational ties with the rest of the Big Guys clique is therefore based on an unequal relationship, as the rest deign to accept him but degrade him behind his back (66, 246-47), and Emenike all the time straining to keep a socially legitimising image by being resourceful with whatever information was handy for them as students (246).

These foundational relational ties, namely friendship relationships, kinship ties and romantic ties constitute basic elements from which transnational social structures develop, and which themselves become subject to dialectic transformation as a result of relations between characters differentially positioned within the transnational space. As Faist suggests, transnational space emerges from intersection of three variables, namely the conditions characterising fledgling postcolonial state (Nigeria for our case), socio-cultural obstacles faced by migrants in the receiving country and the kind of relationships that migrants themselves establish in simultaneously responding to the first two variables ('Transnationalization' 199–200; 'Transnational Social Spaces out of Migration' 217, 224). The characteristics of postcolonial state conducive for catapulting of migrant characters into transnational trajectories invite a deeper examination as this is particularly explored in *Americanah* at the point before the story shifts to American sphere. As a character that would play the critical role of laying the American ground for Ifemelu's emigration to US, Auntie Uju is annexed into the matrix of state excesses through The General. It is instructive that he is only nominally identified as The General, because in him is seen not a human person but the human face of the patriarchal state system which has expropriated power and public resources for itself *qua* state rather than as a trustee of the same resources. In the human form as an avatar of the state, he lavishes public resources and power vested on him supposedly as public trustee, on illicit trysting, while a fundamental service such as financing university education is neglected occasioning the persistent lecturers' strike. For him to sustain Uju to



be his mistress he installs her in the military hospital seeing patients holding “a position that does not officially exist” (*Americanah* 76). This view of The General as an embodiment of the state resonates well with the fact that Aunt Uju’s child is not even named after him, though this fact is registered in order to also underscore anti-patriarchal agenda of decentering man as the locus of identification. It is reported that Aunt Uju named her child “Dike, after *her* father, and gave him *her* surname which left Ifemelu’s mother agitated and sour” (*Americanah* 85 emphasis mine) a glaring break from patrilineal custom for which Ifemelu’s mother stands. From the narrative discourse (specifically through Aunt Uju’s revelation that The General “is happy to know that he can still score a goal at his age, old man like him” (*Americanah* 84); through his gloatingly possessing Aunt Uju’s body as sexual object (he would “[reach] out to slap Aunt Uju’s backside as they went upstairs, saying, “All this for me? All this for me?”” (*Americanah* 79–80), and through arranging the birthing of his son in a metropolitan centre) there is enough evidence that the General is impelled in his undertakings by a need to exercise his masculinity. Aunt Uju’s decision to name her child after his (the child’s) maternal grandfather and handing him her name as his surname discursively disrupts masculinity’s claim to authority and centrality in the identification order.

On his death, Aunt Uju’s vulnerability as a woman, (even more so as an unmarried one) sees her take advice from established and shrewder sex peddlers (Uche and Adesuwa) to escape to America as a safe haven from the vindictive relatives of The General who retreat from confrontation with her, with an ominous promise to “[come] back with our own boys”. A transnational route opened up initially out of exigencies of masculinity is then appropriated to address urgencies of survival, though this is not to suggest that her emigration does mark the end of her tribulations as a woman. Instead it is an ushering in of complications in which American society’s racial dynamics is injected into these tribulations, compounding her economic uncertainties with her own culture’s oppressive structural elements which continue to condition her outlook as a woman even while in the US. This is so much to suggest that Aunt Uju’s existential problem, patent in the fraught demeanour that unravels while in America, is of a complexity that other transnational phenomena epitomise. This aside, however, her physical arrival in America, assured of American citizenship claimed through the birth of Dike in that country, presents as a contact point facilitative of Ifemelu’s later mobility. Seen this way Aunt Uju’s role comes off as accessory to Adichie’s objective of building a transnational web in the narrative discourse around the novel’s principal character, Ifemelu.

*Americanah* also represents the university system as one of nexuses in the transnational space where knowledge and skills capacity as embodied in academics and students circulate and therefore as institutional conduit for cross-border mobility. After perennial lecturers' strikes that have paralysed learning at the university, "[e]veryone was talking about leaving" (*Americanah* 98), lecturers and students alike, in a bid to escape these conditions and by extension, from the failing Nigerian state as provenance of labour acrimony at the universities. Ginika's father captures this sentiment well:

Once, while visiting, Ifemelu had heard Ginika's father say, "We are not sheep. This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any real research in years, because everyday I am organising strikes and talking about unpaid salary and there is no chalk in classrooms." (*Americanah* 64)

Since Ginika's family already has an open avenue to America by means of her African-American mother's American citizenship, it is relatively easy for them to move to Missouri, where her father has a teaching job. Kayode also later moves to the US for his university education. In unclear circumstances, Emenike as well migrates and settles in the UK. Ranyinudo and Ifemelu, however, have to peg their emigration chances to the vagaries of applying for an American visa. The former fails to get the visa but Ifemelu is lucky. Ranyinudo's failure to get visa, however (as Aunt Uju's presentation as a character whose emigration to America comes relatively easy), functions as strategy in the narrative discourse, remaining in Nigeria as Ifemelu's contact while she is in America, and thus ensures a flow of information later between the two countries. Both Aunt Uju and Ranyinudo are thus accessory characters in the narrative construction of transnationalism revolving around Ifemelu as protagonist.

As it is evident from the above preliminary analysis, characters in the narratives are socially tied in specific ways (as friendship ties, school camaraderie, kinship ties, or romantic ties) and therefore engage in specific ways of socially relating in respect of the operative tie. This assertion is grounded in the theoretical resources (associated with Wasserman and Faust) embraced here, that provide for measurement of relational information in the social network formative of transnational configurations in the novel. With intervening spatio-temporal borders occasioned by dispersal from homeland, however, each relational tie is impacted upon in different ways and thus social engagements attendant to the ties before movement is bound to undergo a re-examination or transformation as this is traceable from the protagonist's ways of seeing as she moves. As Wasserman and Faust have posited,

the essential and distinguishing feature of social network perspective, as deployed here, is the measurement of relational information defining the social ties (21). As Roger Fowler prompt us, Wasserman and Faust's relational information are salient in evaluative adjectives or manifest behavioural characteristics that reveal focaliser's attitude to those involved in the relational tie (cited in Simpson 43; see also Wasserman and Faust 18). These textual elements shed light specific ways the protagonist relates with others in the course of migration. One guiding principle in approach to focalisation in the focus texts here is that it is not adequate to simply settle on identifying a unitary centre of focalisation, especially with respect to the narratives that open up long shots on protagonists' elaborate spatial and temporal vista. Because of the ample narrative scope, novels such as *Americanah*, presents protagonists with distinct ways of seeing in different contexts and at different times in the story. Ifemelu's way of seeing before emigration is different from that as she returns to Nigeria, though narrative discourse in the end reconciles this difference. At the same time ways of seeing specific relational ties vary with change in social locations of the protagonist. For instance, how Ifemelu perceives national fellowship, or whether this perception comes to threshold of perception at all, depends on when and where she is (before she migrates, her national identity and attendant national fellowship or its fraught nature is non-issue unlike after her emigration). All the same, at this point in analysis, this ways of seeing are traced chronologically so as to enable a consideration of how the relational ties fare as borders are scaled within story time (time at story level), rather than narrative time (time as organised at discourse level).

Starting with kinship ties identified above, between Ifemelu and her aunt, between Ifemelu and her parents, and between Auntie Uju and Ifemelu's parents, as seen through the moral and cognitive frame of Ifemelu, relational information can be generalised into three. First, as a daughter Ifemelu has a repressed discontent towards the general disposition of her parents. With respect to her mother, this disposition presents as a religious bent, which at its extreme relapse makes her oscillate between religious denominations. At the point that the observing Ifemelu is still an uncomprehending young girl, the view that she permits us of her mother fluctuating in her faith, tells of an observer wary of the psychological, rather than religious, stability of the observed. It is partly through her keen eye for her mother's moral and religious fix and partly through her nascent independence of thought marked off by attitudinal muting of parental tie that she comes to evaluate her mother's religiousness as manifestation of inherent moral evasiveness and even irrationality. To reflect this estrangement from

her mother, the latter is variously referred to as “the woman who was bald and blank” (*Americanah* 41), “his [her father’s] wife” (*Americanah* 43), a distance that permits her nascent critical mind a more or less objective estimation of her mother. This nascent independence of thought thus shows in the ferment aroused by her mother’s change of denomination in quick succession, from Catholicism to Revival Saints church, then to Miracle Springs, shortly after which she departs for Guiding Assembly church. After abatement in this crisis of faith, we are let into Ifemelu’s consciousness in which is revealed the cognitive re-configuration of the image of her mother:

Ifemelu did not think that God had given Pastor Gideon the big house and all those cars, he had of course bought them with money from the three collections at each service, and she did not think that God would do for all as He had done for Pastor Gideon, because it was impossible, but she liked that her mother ate regularly now. The warmth in her mother’s eyes was back, and there was new joy in her bearing .... Her church absorbed her but did not destroy her. It made her predictable and easy to lie to. (44)

Evidently, Ifemelu has cultivated a tolerant attitude to this proclivity to religious excess but with an enduring sense of impatience that she tries to repress. To Ifemelu’s disquieted worldview, her mother’s crisis of faith emerges as peculiar, but as this crisis becomes more instrumental in her mother’s perception of the world around them, Ifemelu become increasingly unsettled by it, especially after Aunt Ifemelu meets The General which, as her mother comprehends, is a divine intervention. As a result of her mother’s peddling of this religious reading of divine hand in the coming of The General into Aunt Uju’s life, Ifemelu reads ridicule from Chetachi, an envious young woman living on the upper floor in Ifemelu’s flat, exacerbating her discomfiture and annoyance at her mother:

“Eh! Aunt Uju is lucky ol!” Chetachi said

Ifemelu did not miss the knowing smirk on her face. Chetachi and her mother must have already gossiped about the car.

....

“God should bless the man o. Me I hope I will also meet a mentor when I graduate,” Chetachi said. Ifemelu bristled at Chetachi’s goading. Still it was her mother’s fault, to so eagerly tell the neighbours her mentor story. She should not have; it was nobody’s business what Aunt Uju did.... Ifemelu could not understand this, her mother’s ability to tell herself stories about her reality that did not even resemble her reality. (*Americanah* 45)

Her relation towards her mother, therefore, is shrouded with some reservation because of her obtrusive religiousness. Religious zealotry has engendered a social righteousness to claim and proclaim superficial materialism as function of God’s hand even if this is insidiously adverse to Aunt Uju’s future well-being.

On the other hand, the image that filters to us of her father, (which highlights the value attached to economic and social capital in the world they inhabit) is that of a man with afflicted ego, mostly deriving from denial of his humble circumstances which his wife, on her side, covers for with strong religious conviction. Shortcomings in economic and social capital afflicting him lie at the root of desire prevalent among presented characters to emigrate to America as space of prosperity and prestige. As shown above, Ifemelu endures her mother's overzealous religiosity with exasperation, but she reserves some degree of sympathy for her ego-bruised father wishing that he spoke Igbo instead of English because then "he seemed unconscious of his own anxieties" (*Americanah* 48). She sees him as both unrealized scholar and one nursing an ego denied the true class identity and because of this, suffers quietly:

Looking at him as he sat mute on the sofa, she thought how much he looked like what he was, a man full of blanched longings, a middle-brow civil servant who wanted a life different from what he had, who had longed for more education than he was able to get... But his mannered English bothered her as she got older, because it was costume, his shield against insecurity. He was haunted by what he did not have - a postgraduate degree, an upper middle-class life - and so his affected words became his armour. She preferred it when he spoke Igbo; it was the only time he seemed unconscious of his own anxieties. (47-48)

His ego defence mechanisms become bolder when he loses his job, having refused to address a female superior at his workplace as "mummy" (*Americanah* 46), a demeaning requirement for a man as himself. When he subsequently fails to pay house rent, he experiences a depression, especially as he has to seek help from others including Aunt Uju, an act he also finds degrading. There is an avenue, however, of rescuing one's social standing that is valued in their world, which ties up the aspiration to migration. When Ifemelu suffers appendicitis while at Obinze's home in Nsukka and her parents visit them, her father is overawed by the fact that Obinze's mother's education is British. Therefore, any association with metropolitan culture provides an avenue to rescue one's social image that Ifemelu's father direly needs. This is satisfied when Ifemelu has the opportunity to move to America. Displaced means of bolstering the social capital is thus central in creating conducive mental environment for transnational mobility. As similarly see in the short story 'Imitation' transnational location of one's wife opens an avenue to re-orient masculinity in much the same way that moving abroad generates social capital that Ifemelu's households desperately needs.

Even though Ifemelu comes to adopt a measured attitude in her relationship with her parents, she still accords them some parental esteem, tempered with a tolerance, albeit conditioned by these

reservations. Her reservations in the way she relates to her mother stem from the mother's tendency to punctuate her apprehensions of the world around her with religious explanations, a woman "who had to spread the cloak of religion over her own petty desires" (51). For her father, her reservations relate to the complexes arising from his ego. In the overall, therefore, her relation with them is constrained by her perception of both as acting out of an impulsion whose net effect is to mask their fears arising from their own precarious social positions both as man and woman individually and as parents, but even as she at the same time embrace them with some degree of grudging acceptance. Against this backdrop, an opportunity to live in America becomes an attractive one for the assumption that it holds the breakthrough out of their social and economic circumstances.

With respect to her aunt, a sister-figure with whom she has developed a close relationship dating to as far back as Ifemelu can recall, the time of her infancy when the latter instinctively gravitated to the thirteen-year old Auntie Uju, despite "the family legend" that the little Ifemelu always recoiled from strangers (53). But, then, the infant Ifemelu "walked over and climbed into her [Auntie Uju's] lap and stayed there," there from setting off "a charmed tale of the beginning of their closeness," which continues later as Auntie Uju takes her through her early womanhood, for example introducing her to women fashion magazines and romance literature, home tricks for woman's beauty and seeing her through her sexual maturation. Out of this, each becomes a confidante for the other, with Auntie Uju, according to Ifemelu's mother, being "the only person [Ifemelu] will listen to," as well as that she "exerted a calming influence" (52, 53) on her, according to her father. In turn Auntie Uju commands Ifemelu's sympathy and protective instinct. On learning of the precariousness of her aunt's life as a concubine, she is possessed by a sense of fright for her well-being and to her "she looked suddenly small and bewildered among the detritus of her new life" (77). Even despite an instance when Auntie Uju slaps Ifemelu as a result of the latter's well-meant intention to help her realise the source of her tribulations, their aunt-niece relationship flourishes. On the day The General fails to turn up for a romantic Muslim holiday at the residence where he has stationed Auntie Uju, the latter is enraged and displaces her anger on her house help, Chikodili, prompting Ifemelu to intervene: "Ifemelu was watching from the kitchen entrance. 'Auntie, the person you should be shouting at is The General'" (*Americanah* 81). But in their relationship Ifemelu assumes the role of moral beacon and confidante, that quite often exerts a negligible impact on Auntie Uju's decisions. This negligible impact can be accounted for in the fact that Ifemelu is younger of age and this sense of age seniority shapes her

aunt's uptake of her moral direction, both while in Nigeria and while in America. But Ifemelu is always ready to support and protect her at a time of dire need. For example, when Aunt Uju has to quickly vacate the house at Dolphins Estate, upon the death of the General, when the latter's relatives come threatening, Ifemelu, together with her boyfriend, Obinze, is at hand to help evacuate her. Ifemelu also sacrifices her initial time in America in order to support her by babysitting Dike as Aunt Uju juggles jobs and studies. This suggests her deep sense of responsibility for the well-being of her aunt, without moralising the experiences that Aunt Uju goes through. She also extends this sense of responsibility to Dike, her Aunt Uju's son.

In general, it can be observed that in the kinship relation between Ifemelu as a daughter and her parents and that between her as a niece and her aunt, Ifemelu is positioned as a moral actor, through whom our grasp of the others in this triadic relation is filtered. Central element that positions her as moral compass comes down to her radical personality trait that we have already witnessed in the way, for example, she reacts to Sister Ibinabo's command to participate in making garlands for church guests whose integrity she doubts. This compositional variable is crucial later in her negotiation for her place as African woman migrant in America.

Different from this kind of relation that define kinship ties above is the relation between Ifemelu and Obinze. Ifemelu's assumption of moral position in the kinship relationship can be seen here as a way of foregrounding a social questioning attitude, relating to social, political and moral integrity. However, with regard to her relationship with Obinze, this questioning attitude is absent. Instead positional elevation is ceded to Obinze as we appreciate his profile through the eyes of Ifemelu. One way of understanding this profile of him is through figuring the image that Ifemelu has of her closest friend, Ginika. Ginika embodies an ideal image of a young woman according to Ifemelu's view as a young woman too. This image is described in terms of humility, physical beauty (which incidentally, takes whiteness as yardstick for feminine beauty) and, as it would turn out later on, her ability to deal positively with competition for romantic relation:

The second most popular girl was Ginika, Ifemelu's close friend. Ginika did not go abroad often, and so did not have the air of *away* as Yinka did, but she had caramel skin and wavy hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead of standing Afro-like. Each year, she was voted Prettiest Girl in their form, and she would wryly say, "It's just because I'm a half-caste. How can I be finer than Zainab?" (55-56; emphasis in the original)



With this image in mind, she is predisposed to instinctively pair her up with another ideal partner, even, as quite unlike her, invoking supernatural forces as guarantors of Ginika's entitlement to the best romance partner in her school: "The gods, the hovering deities who gave and took teenage loves, had decided that Obinze would go out with Ginika." (55). Her image of Obinze is that he was too good to be suitable for her but deserving of an ideal girl embodied in her close friend, Ginika. Through Ifemelu's eyes, we see Obinze as a self-mortifying, intelligent, well-read and suave, first impression attributes that endears him to her. But the main attribute in him that ennoble him in her eyes is his revelation as to why he opted for her rather than the ideal feminine figure of Ginika. This relates to her personality trait that, back at her home and at church, has been a cause for conflict with her parents, namely that she embodies qualities that socially do not belong to her as a girl but to a boy and at best are supposed to be antisocial (52). When Ifemelu, out of curiosity, enquires from Obinze what Kayode had told him concerning her, prompting him to tilt his interest towards her rather than Ginika, he reports:

"Nothing bad. He likes you."

"You don't want to tell me what he said."

"He said, 'Ifemelu is a fine babe but she is too much trouble. She can argue. She can talk. She never agrees. But Ginika is just a *sweet* girl.'" He paused, then added, "He didn't know that was exactly what I hoped to hear. *I am not interested in girls that are too nice.*" (60; emphasis added)

That he cherishes what in her others want weeded out instantly distinguishes him in her eyes. This in effect is a discursive statement within narrative discourse (looked at vis-à-vis other endearing feminine trait like skin colour and hair character) that widens the range of female attributes that construct her beauty to include temperamental beauty. Being "sweet" or "nice" here hints at the socially cherished female pliability that would facilitate subsuming of such females into man's unconstrained influence and use (as for example in the case of Aunt Uju with regard to The General). Not being sweet or not being nice in this context, therefore, equates to what Okuyade phrases as nuisance as defiance of phallogocentric morality ('Rescinding Orthodoxy, Resuscitating Mother Tongue Interference in African Female Narratives' 51). His embrace of her nonconformity engenders in her "a self-affection" that would be critical in her conscious exercise of womanhood most notably as she begins life as an immigrant in America and upon return to Nigeria. But even before she leaves Nigeria, this nonconformity already manifest in her initiating the very first intimacy moves with Obinze, which



becomes the more reason for his attachment to her. It is also the image of his mother, later on, who overawes her with their open banter on sex and sexuality, as well as the connectedness that Obinze and his mother have to their cultural philosophy as expressed through Igbo language. In short, therefore, a haloed image of Obinze is fostered in her view as a corresponding self-worth as a woman begins to thrive in her. While navigating through the adaptation process in the US, she would constantly invoke his imbibed outlook as a strategy to apprehend her new circumstances as a black woman in those new social contexts. Obinze is thus not just a romance partner to her, but above this, he is a haloed figure whose worldview, deducible from his unconditional acceptance of her personality as a woman, is significant in her encounter with American social conditions.

These basic relationships and the protagonist personal traits established early in the expositional beginning of the story provide grounds for the growth and development of series of linkages facilitative of Ifemelu's subsequent transnational life and how the transnational structure and locations forces a reconfiguration of these basic relationships. The most basic in function of these ties is that which emerge between the US and Nigeria linking Ifemelu, Ginika and Auntie Uju. As Dahinden paradoxically argues, localised anchorage is necessary in facilitating mobility and thus a transnational circulation of persons as well as their adaptation to their transnational locations ('Dynamics of Migrant Transnational Formations' 51–52). How this applies to the relationship between the three characters becomes clear if it is considered that Auntie Uju's prestige-necessitated birthing at Atlanta in the US, is auspicious as an opportunity to open an alternative national space for herself, her son and for Ifemelu. This avenue comes into being through The General who, it is reported, "has his people there" in Atlanta where he establishes her for the birth of his son, and for which purpose he has rented a condo. Establishment of Auntie Uju in this way is a fortuitous creation of future alternative locality both for herself (when the General tragically dies in a plane crash leaving her vulnerable to The General's extended family in Nigeria) and for her niece, Ifemelu (who is seeking to be in America for a different purpose of escaping frustrations of studying in a Nigerian university paralysed by lecturers' strikes). Having had the roots established in the US, makes it easier for Auntie Uju to return there, even though she has to contend with difficulties of settling down both economically and occupationally. Out of these difficulties, she sells to Ifemelu the idea of joining her in the US for her studies as well help baby-sit Dike and thus cut costs, while she struggles to earn credentials for her medical practice.

Ginika on the other hand, as a close friend and already established abroad, is handy in helping Ifemelu send applications to various schools, herself having had the experience and familiarity of the college system, school system and the general topographical character of where she studied. When she calls Ifemelu in Nigeria she says, “I just wanted you to know I’m focusing on the Philadelphia area because I went here,” (99), a communication that, particularly in the way it is phrased, arouses confidence in Ifemelu. Ginika’s recommendation of Philadelphia suggests there is no adverse experience she has of the place that she might want to be wary of wholeheartedly recommending it to anyone. She has mastered the place, an implicit mastery that is reassuringly superfluous for Ifemelu. We detect this confidence in assuring superfluity in the witty narratorial comment about Ginika’s communication: “as though Ifemelu knew where Philadelphia was. To her, America was America.” This self-mocking, prompted by her own implicitly declared ignorance about American geographical places, conveys the notion that she trusts and depends on Ginika to know the places she mentions. Ginika’s familiarity with the reputation, location and the application procedures for those colleges, therefore, sees Ifemelu get not only a placement in a college there but also secures a scholarship. When ultimately she arrives in America, Ginika is still at hand to help her make place for herself in her new environment, including in her mischievous orientation about how Africans, and the blacks generally, are perceived by white Americans. She is also critical in helping Ifemelu find a job as a babysitter through the local social network she had already forged while she did her internship after college. Later in the narrative, when Ifemelu runs out of options in trying to raise her college fees and yields to the tennis coach’s sex job, it is the moral and psychological support from Ginika that turns Ifemelu back from a suicidal brink ensuing from this sexual exploitation.

The transnational meaning of the relationship between Ifemelu and Obinze is more complex as it involves more than mobility and local rootedness. His erudite grip of the intricacies of the everyday American life is also handy as he helps steer Ifemelu through the complexities of American society. Well-read about America, his resourcefulness is an email away, recommending which books she should read for her own apprehension of the American world. Email, postal and telephone communication between them, bridge Nigeria and the bewildering America. For Ifemelu these means of communication re-adapts the figure of Obinze from being just a lover to more or less a pocket resource in her initial adaptation to the new realities. Any question, seemingly complex for Ifemelu to tackle, including day to day decision making, such as where or from whom to make enquiries about

payment of her outstanding college fees, she has Obinze at hand, through telephone communication, to unravel the difficulty (132). As argued above, however, Obinze cuts more than a figure of a lover inspiring her through the difficulties of adjusting as an immigrant. His philosophical disposition suffuses Ifemelu's consciousness, including instances when she almost effortlessly invokes his worldview in trying to comprehend the perplexities of the American world. The deployment of this worldview can be seen as prevailing in her relationship with her first employer in America, Kimberly Turner, for whom Ifemelu babysits. She sees this employer as a kindly, well-meaning person, unwary of her unintended racial prejudice. When her insolent sister, Laura, makes priggish insinuations about Ifemelu's being in America, Kimberly is always ready at hand with some apology albeit to an excessive degree. Because of this attribute, Ifemelu invokes Obinze's ways of understanding such persons as Kimberly: "But on the first day, she liked Kimberly, her breakable beauty, her purplish eyes full of the expression Obinze often used to describe the people he liked: *obi ocha*. A clean heart." (*Americanah* 147). Even though Kimberly become "truly, friends" (*Americanah* 147) after Ifemelu's bold renunciation of Kimberly's overt fusing of beauty and blackness, Obinze's worldview, especially as to how a good-natured person outwardly looks like orients her boldness. Kimberly's person is kindly because she conforms to the image of a kind-hearted person constructed in Obinze's terms and from whom she has imbibed it. Other than this, Obinze provides a cross-border mirror in which she can track her gradual habituation into American mannerisms, and thus acknowledge her own positive strides in conquering America:

"You know you said 'excited'? Obinze asked her one day, his voice amused. "You said you were excited about your media class."  
"I did?"

New words were tumbling out of her mouth. Columns of mist were dispersing. (136)

Their transnational locations throw into sharp relief her slow but satisfying blending in. Obinze's pointing out of this fact, therefore, arouses a feeling of achievement in her, though this would be tested in the sexual exploitation she would experience later on.

## Engendering Transnationalism

In a graphic representation of different sources of social capital among groups of immigrants in the US, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1345) contemplate the value of what they call 'social antecedents' of these sources. Social antecedents are the structural social conditions in which immigrants find

themselves in their new environments and which compel them to reconfigure their social relations with themselves as immigrants, with receiving communities and with source communities. But in addition to the structural social conditions overdetermining migrant experience at this one end of a migrant's life, Levitt ('Simultaneity' 1003) and Dahinden [(52) extend these antecedents to those localised at migrant's space of origin. This is what Waldinger and Duquette-Rury capture when they write that "[e]very immigrant is an emigrant, every alien a citizen, every foreigner a national" (42), reproduced as epigram to the present chapter. Migrants are both constrained and enabled by the socio-cultural and regulatory regimes that characterise both ends of the migration process. This is exemplified in the experiences of the major characters in *Americanah*, like Ifemelu and her aunt, Uju, who because of their different personality traits differently endure this complex criss-crossing of temporalities. On one hand, Ifemelu is agentically assertive in contexts charged with racial and gender overtones and the latter conforms to subject position as Nigerian woman and as black immigrant woman. Whereas Auntie Uju's ways of seeing evince an attitude of resignation to her fate as seen from these two national positions (as Nigerian woman and as black immigrant in America), Ifemelu's portrays that of an agent working to disrupt the social structures prevailing in the two polar ends of her transnational life. As Portes also suggests, immigrants have to contend with multiplicity of "contextual factors" that characterise their new social environments and which have an implication on how they constitute social relations with fellow immigrants and with their source communities (1322). This recalls the observation that consequent from the various vulnerabilities in the receiving end of the migration process, migrants reconstitute their social being in adapting to these adverse social environments (Bach, Schiller and Szanton-Blanc 27-28; Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 9), adaptations which are salient from their ways of seeing, or in the way these new and old contexts (together with objects and characters inhabiting these respective contexts) are focalised. They establish and sustain social networks that traverse national and continental boundaries if only to orient themselves, psychologically, economically, socially and culturally both at their destinations and in relation to their communities of origin. These social environments, therefore, engender the development of social networks fundamental in securing basic needs, exchange of goods and services (both symbolic and basic), and in securing vital psychological and social support (Vertovec, 'Migration and Other Modes of Transnationalism' 650).

Through attaching the notion of engendering to the subtitle of this section, the position taken here is that social antecedents constituting principal characters' social circumstances and responses to these circumstances are given gender dimension in the way these are focalised. The social ecologies (Nigerian and American set-ups) that are brought to view are thus approached here as focalised by a central figure that assumes such ways of seeing as black woman. The choice of texts for the purposes of illuminating the transnationally productive social conditions is because the target narratives feature extended presentation of experiences of character at immigrant phases of the migration cycle. In these narratives the focal characters are either on an impending return migration, having undergone a transnational socialisation process, or have just entered the US or British social space and are thus subject to a criss-crossing regime of dynamics rooted in different temporalities (namely temporal realities of host society and those at origin). In *Americanah* Ifemelu has been in the US for thirteen years, throughout which she has circulated as a subject of the racially stratified American society.

A focus on social antecedents will give particular illumination on these aspects of migrants' localities with a view to relating them to how central characters produce transnational linkages and mobilities. In tandem with this, since transnationalism does not merely suggest social activity across national boundaries but an activity under scrutiny of the state (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-santon 7-8; Park and Wee 50-51; Levitt and Dehesa 589), the role of national structures as forces conditioning these transnational social activity will also be viewed as instrumental not only in catapulting individual focal characters into transnational space but also in generating the impetus for mobility and linkage within that space. Therefore, in order to fully account for transnational personal networks characterising the narrative worlds in the texts, it is necessary to explore the conditions which attend the narrator-focalizers' and character-focalizers' arrival in the US as the provenance of these form of social linkage. From this overview, various dimensions of embeddedness of the migrants that undergird transnational formation will be drawn in the section succeeding the next one. To avoid redundancy, identification of focal place, as prescribed by Molina et al (227-228), will be co-opted by integrating it into discussion on transnational personal network. After all, transnational localities are already marked in the narratives as spaces, that is as places perceived or focalised in certain ways (Bal 133). The perceiving or focalising centres are taken as character-egos (that is as nodal points) in personal networks established in the narratives.

## Class, Race and Gender Intersectionality in *Americanah*

As with CRT's approach to the status of persons of colour in America's social structure, *Americanah* presents a protagonist that undergoes a slump in status with insertion, through physical arrival, into a society with pre-existing set positions for women, blacks, and immigrants, as well as class structures that are in place. These come together discursively in the protagonist as a newly inserted subject, producing a compound experience of oppression that is traceable in the protagonist's focalising function. America's socio-political matrix from which intersectional convergence of oppressive forces crystallise from protagonist way of experiencing and responding to this matrix render the protagonist's arrival in terms which Boersma and Schinkel characterise as perpetual arrival, a migrant's condition of elusive settlement in the migration destination (322). As an immigrant Ifemelu is kept at the margins, courtesy of these intersecting planes of identification, by the discursive forces (here exemplified by racially tempered social relations, gender and class structuring) that define America's society. In this section, these intersectional forces are grasped as the essential catalysts of the conflicts in the narrative. In other words, they are social problems, structural in nature, that manifest at points where they establish first physical and social contact, and are experienced by the focal character as problems that they have to contend with in navigating social spaces in America. Their catalytic nature in the narrative conflict feature in actualization of the focal character's innate personal traits, despite a slump in their social status, as critical vector facilitating localised embedding.

As Faist suggests, transnational space obtains from the juncture of three variables (the conditions characterising postcolonial state, socio-cultural impediments faced by migrants in the receiving country and the kind of relationships that migrants themselves forge in simultaneously confronting the first two variables ('Transnationalization' 199–200; 'Transnational Social Spaces out of Migration' 217, 224). Faist adds that destination country's policies that claim liberal ideals on the surface (yet actually operate contra these ideals) also positively influence the establishment, fostering or re-adaptation of transnational ties. Contrary to the surface assertion in this claim, the oppressive underlay of this liberal facade, that nonetheless is crucial for forging migrant-migrant relations and migrants-natives relations in America, invites a deeper examination as this is particularly explored in *Americanah*

In *Americanah*, racial overtones in Ifemelu's first encounter with white Americans, the Turners, whose children she would eventually be charged with care, becomes clearer if a brief assessment is done of her pre-emigration frame of mind with regard to America. In other words Nigerians' ways of seeing or imagining America and Americans vis-à-vis Nigeria and Nigerians can be extrapolated from the way the narrative universe is focalised. As soon as she has had the luck to move to the US, in the face of continual lecturers' strikes which has largely paralysed her career in Nigeria, her concerns are those conditioned by circumstances in her home country. These circumstances are mainly characterised by the economic situation of her family and the more or less dysfunctional nation-state apparatus. Her father is out of employment and her mother is a "vice-principal," a salary from which they "would manage" to get by (*Americanah* 46). To point at her father's penurious circumstance:

Her father pressed a slender envelop into her hand, saying, "I wish I had more," and she realized, with sadness, that he must have borrowed it. In the face of the enthusiasm of others, she suddenly felt flaccid and afraid (100)

This manifests the adverse economic conditions, reversed in pre-emigration phantasmal image of America as a place of perfection and a place where she would redeem her lot economically. Most notably, she figures herself "in a house from the *Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free from wear and crease" (*Americanah* 99), a revealing observation that paints America as place of inexhaustible perfection. Linked with this imagination of vast perfection is the perception that "America was America" (*Americanah* 99) and as such is an undifferentiated and unmottled sphere of perfection and advancement. In her communication with Obinze, there is a note that a standard and mutual expectation among Nigerians (both among those living in Nigeria as well as those living America) of unidirectional movement of favours, where those in Nigeria are by default identify as recipients and those who have moved to America (regardless of their economic stations as immigrants) are donors: "*How can you be sending me money from Nigeria?* It should be the other way round," she said. But he sent it to her anyway, a little over a hundred dollars carefully sealed in a card (*Americanah* 145 emphasis added). The note of incredulity underscored by Ifemelu's question gestures towards a reversal of donor-recipient roles fixed in the cognitive topography of Nigerians, whether as movers or stayers.

However, absent from this imagination is the implication that her gender, and class characteristic and racialised identity would have on her arrival and subsequent settlement in a country with an already



established history of racial and class stratification. From the moment she lands at the airport where she is received by Auntie Uju nothing prepares her for a contrary image of America that upset her utopian fancy of it. With some surprise, she receives her first note of racial hierarchy, from a fellow migrant from Grenada, who reveals that they were planning to relocate from Flatlands, a Brooklyn neighbourhood where they lived, to a different neighbourhood to avert socialisation of their children into “behaving like these black Americans” (*Americanah* 112). When Jane, the Grenadian woman, shares with her this racial derogation, Ifemelu interjects: “What do you mean?” to which Jane, evidently noting Ifemelu’s apparent naivety, answers her: “Don’t worry, you will understand with time” (*Americanah* 112). There is an indication here that social undesirability, in the American social structure, is extensively linked to being African American. She is further surprised when Auntie Uju, herself already resigned to the subject position of being black, tells her that “all of us look alike to white people” (*Americanah* 120), a philosophical grasp of white’s ways of seeing blacks, and which corroborates Jane, the Grenadian’s pathologisation of blacks as behaviourally malfunctioning if not amorphous mass of degenerate population. Auntie Uju says this in relation to her procurement of her friend, Ngozi Okonkwo’s, Social Security card by means of which Ifemelu is to seek employment through impersonation. Auntie Uju’s intimation to Ifemelu of the whites’ undistinguishing of the black attests to her normalising of her own racial marginality in the hegemonically white America. This accepting attitude in turn points to a racist demarcation of what ought to be identified and described on one hand and what has to remain synonymous or general by virtue of blackness. The lumping attitude of the white that erase individuality of dark-skinned persons, relegating them to synonymity is revealing of the value attached to blackness. Skin colour to the whites, in this sense, is a homogenising tag in which blackness precludes interest in noticing the elevating traits of human individuality. A further indexing of this systemic omission in the narrative emerges from another disclosure from Auntie Uju that Olga, her white Russian friend and an aspiring practitioner of dermatology, is relocating away from the black neighbourhood because “skin diseases look different on black skin” (142)..As an aspiring dermatologist, we would expect Olga to be curious about how one dermatological ailment presents in different skin tones (with the assumption that her training presuppose only white patients). We could also possibly explain her decision to move out of the neighbourhood by attributing her lack of curiosity to laziness or parochialism in medical ambition.



After all the utterance from Olga is reported in a well-meant manner by Aunt Uju who does not seem to read racial undertones in the former's utterance:

"You're leaving New York to go to a village in Massachusetts? Can you just leave residency like that?" [Ifemelu asked].

"Of course. My friend Olga, the one from Russia? She is leaving too, but she will have to repeat a year in her new programme. She wants to practice dermatology and most of our patients here are black and she said skin diseases look different on black skin and she knows she will not end up practicing in a black area, so she wants to go where patients will be white. I don't blame her. (*Americanah* 142)

True import of Olga's utterance is not in itself evident given that we learn about it from an unreliable reporter (Aunt Uju). Uju is unreliable a reporter because, as Wayne Booth puts it, she does not "[speak] for or [act] in accordance with the norms of the work" (quoted in Murphy and Walsh 68), which in the case of the novel refers authorial affront on racism. However, considering the focal agent, Ifemelu's function of selection of focal subjects and response to them, Olga's decision (justifiable in the eyes of Aunt Uju) is reconfigured around racist attitudes on the practice of medicine and thus she cites difficulties in diagnosing dermatological ailments among blacks as a veil for her racial attitudes towards blacks. In this sense if we are to absolve her from the guilt of racism, we would have to explain her reaction by asserting that the colour of the patient regularises or standardises the study of skin diseases. Still this would implicate her way of seeing as coming forth from a location configured by the prevailing whiteness that extends its structuring effect on medical training and practice.<sup>20</sup> Racism thus reveals itself in this case as consignment of the black to medical margins. As pointed out, Aunt Uju has already reconciled herself to this racial margin, as she absolves Olga from guilt of racism, rationalising that Olga's relocation is purely locational choice rather than racial preference (*Americanah* 142).

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<sup>20</sup> I borrow from Heintz et al's study of husband-wife roles within the wider social structure which determines such roles: ...the individual's *structural neighborhood* shapes his behavior. The structural neighborhood is given by the individual's *configuration of roles and statuses*. This implies that the structural neighborhood of an individual determines, to a certain and varying extent, his life-action-time-space. In other words, the structure of society determines a time-space which the individual is supposed to perceive as his life-action-time-space.(861 (*si*) emphasis in the original).

In literary terms, Heintz et al's "structural neighborhood" cover what the term "role" refers to and which is filled in by a specific character who (though he or she possess unique individual traits) functions generally in terms the role as a discursive slot dictates.

## Aversive racism

A specific form of racism that assails Ifemelu's initial way of regarding American society, first encountered while shopping for a dress with Ginika, is aversive racism. This is to suggest that racism comes to her at first in this subtle form which stirs her into an awareness of her identity as black person in America. As noted in chapter onewhile bringing the work of CRT scholars to horizon of this research, aversive racism is a form of subtle racism comprising discomposure, awkwardness or anxiety driven by ambivalent claim to racial egalitarianism yet one that is hounded by guilt of prejudice (Dovidio et al. 271). While at clothing store, the cashier specifically exhibits this awkwardness and discomfort while trying to have Ginika and Ifemelu identify the salesperson who assisted them in the store. As soon as the two enter the store a white woman is at hand to attend to them. As they move to the move to pay for the item they had chosen, the cashier (a white woman) finds it embarrassing to racially identify the particular saleswoman (since, presumably, she had not seen the interaction between Ginika, Ifemelu and the particular saleswoman) as either black or white:

At the checkout, the blonde cashier asked, "Did anybody help you?"  
 "Yes," Ginika said.  
 "Chelcy or Jennifer?"  
 "I'm sorry, I don't remember her name." Ginika looked around, to point at her helper, but both had disappeared into the fitting rooms at the back.  
 "Was it the one with long hair?" the cashier asked.  
 "Well both had long hair."  
 "The one with dark hair?"  
 "Both of them had dark hair."  
 Ginika smiled and looked at the cashier and the cashier smiled and looked at the computer screen, and two damp seconds crawled past before she cheerfully said, "It's okay, I'll figure it out later and make sure she gets her commission." (*Americanah* 126–27)

The cashier's discomposure evidently stems from a belief in the need to maintain superficial racial sameness evidenced in her awkward hesitation at stating whether the assistant was black or white. As Dovidio et al point out, the cashier finds aversive the possibility that as a white person (with implications of America's history of racial oppression in favour of white race) she "might be prejudiced" (271). This awkwardness is also to feature in one of Ifemelu's classes occasioned by the word "nigger" which crops up as a topical issue, 137–138). When Wambui, a Kenyan student in Ifemelu's class, audaciously raises a question on the editing out of the word "nigger" in a scene from the film *Roots* played in class, "a collective sigh, like a small wind, swept through the class" (137). The African American student in the class, with a sense of moral authority, submits that the taboo status

of the word “nigger” arises from “the pain the word has caused” (137) as a result of historical disparagement of the black people. Implicit in this response is that the “pain” is still being felt and to ameliorate it, “nigger” should be kept a taboo word. Wambui’s unapologetic boldness presents a view of how race and racism is disaffirmed in American public sphere, for the sake of social correctness, despite the fact that, as one “pale, shaggy-haired boy” in the class says “each time you say it, the word hurts African Americans” (137). Wambui wonders aloud:

“It makes no sense to me,”

....

“I mean, ‘nigger’ is a word that exists. People use it. It is part of America. It has caused a lot of pain to people and I think it is insulting to bleep it out.”

“Well,” Professor Moore said, looking around as though for help. (137)

Throughout this awkward raced discussion, Ifemelu, as the focalising centre, is present as a studious African alien, marking out reactions and counter-reactions of those present. Contrary to pre-migration expectations about Americans and their society, Ifemelu is baffled Americans’ curious discomfiture on questions of race relations, symptomatic of existing racial gulf. As well, non-American blacks like Wambui from a non-racialized African background perceive a perplexing disconnect between Americans’ perception of their historical realities and their present social consciousness, highlighting the potential importance of the marginal immigrant in not only destabilising normalised but insidious racial configuration, but in provoking open discussions on race and racism as endemic to American society.

### **Invisible whiteness**

The more Ifemelu becomes entangled in the American social life, first through being with her roommates, American culture begins to take shape for her and that, for example, partying was an event where participants “stand around and drink” rather than dance as is the case back in Nigeria (*Americanah* 129). Through the same roommates, Ifemelu learns the hard way about what she terms “boundaries of hospitality” (*Americanah* 129) in America where, unlike in her Nigerian homeland, an invitation for a meal is a request for company rather than an offer of free meal. Upon being invited by Allison (one of the three of her roommates) for “a bite” Ifemelu erroneously thinks Allison is offering to buy her a meal, but as it turns out “when the waitress brought the bill, Allison carefully began to untangle how many drinks each person had ordered and who had calamari appetizer, to make

sure nobody paid for anybody else” (*Americanah* 129), which in effect disabuse her boundless American hospitality. Secondly, classroom interactions present another avenue through which Ifemelu begins to appreciate the invisible but potent racial dynamics that have to be navigated by Americans in order to maintain status quo between races. When Professor Moore who teaches them provocatively introduces the contentious subject of race and racism in class, which arouses a flammable debate, from the focal centre is visible “a vague terror [that] freezing her features [Professor Moore’s] into a smirk-smile” (*Americanah* 138), a sign that even the Professor has to brave through an uncomfortable topic that invokes race and racism. Thirdly, through her interaction with fellow immigrant students from Africa she is not only given an informal crash course on what to expect from and of Americans as well as how to approach America and its peoples. Even though she does not directly recall these lessons later on in her struggle to establish her space as an immigrant, these discursively enter into this later struggle to disrupt these rigid and stilted racial relations. Formative as these three factors are in enabling Ifemelu to take a positioned self-address to these relations she finds in place, the most important source of psychological compass is Obinze who is always a phone call away on American matters she needs vital answers. She calls him just to hear his voice which “[calms] her” (*Americanah* 132), and receives the suggestion to read American books by which “America’s mythologies began to take on meaning, America’s tribalism – race, ideology and region – became clear. And she was consoled by her new knowledge” (*Americanah* 136). The more she exhibits what Levitt characterises as purposive innovation (*Transnational Villagers* 57), she develops a compulsion to educate herself about American society, “to wear a new, knowing skin right away” (135). With encouragement from Obinze, she avidly reads variety of books, novels, historical documents, and biographies, including James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* and William Faulkner’s *Light in August*, both of which explore the place of race in American society and history. In the overall Obinze, whose presence is made possible through “cheap phone cards” (*Americanah* 132) and email, overwhelmingly exert a stabilising force on her through initial disorienting arrival, with the communication between them acting as a ventilating mechanism for her uncertainties: “With him, she could feel whatever she felt, and she did not have to force some cheer into her voice, as she did with her parents, telling them she was fine, very hopeful to get waitress job, settling down very well with her classes” (*Americanah* 132). Communication with Obinze is thus a true vent for her frustration unlike that with her parents for whom she is compelled to keep a false image of coping with her new life away from home.

Her bid for self-education on American society pays off as it makes her more perceptive in apprehending nuances of prejudices among Americans with whom she interacts. Her first personal experience of such racial prejudice, other than aversive racism she vicariously experiences at the clothing store with Ginika, is in her first visit with the latter to the Turners, which occurs as inverted racism. Kimberly is inclined to overemphasise, even indiscriminately ascribe sublime beauty to black women. She overly punctuates her references to black people, women specifically, with the qualification “beautiful,” or would invariably refer to Nigerian foods as “wonderful organic food and vegetable” prompting Ifemelu to subsequently construe this elevating description as implying blackness or arcane (146-147). She deduces from Kimberly’s body language a racial conception of culture, a language she has observed to be consistently characteristic of the condescension of the white:

Kimberly was smiling the kindly smile of people who thought “culture” the unfamiliar colourful reserve of colourful people, a word that always had to be qualified with “rich”. She would not think Norway had a “rich culture”. (146)

Since Norway, a predominantly white nation, would not be of “colourful” people, it would not be characterised by culture, but as Ifemelu comes from Nigeria, a black country, and unfamiliar by virtue of blackness, hers is possessed of “rich culture”. Arguably, therefore, Kimberly conflates culture with racial identity, where culture and non-culture are metonymic of non-white and white racial identities, respectively. However, with her awakening to subtleties of racism in her erstwhile egalitarian America, Ifemelu does not leave Kimberly’s well-meant interest in the former’s name as a cultural marker. By bluntly rejecting Kimberly’s melding of separation between being of colour and being beautiful, she disrupts her white-black scheme, with far-reaching implications on how the two would relate. It is dawning moment in how the two would relate henceforth in the narrative, as the two look at a black model on a magazine:

“Oh, look at this beautiful woman,” and pointed at a plain model in a magazine whose only distinguishing feature was her very dark skin. “Isn’t she just stunning?”

“No, she isn’t.” Ifemelu paused. “You know, you can just say ‘black’. Not every black person is beautiful.”

Kimberly was taken aback, something wordless spread on her face and then she smiled, and Ifemelu would think of it as the moment they became, truly, friends. (147)

Kimberly's racialised appreciation of people of colour is further indicated in her treasuring of the Indian women captured in photographs taken while on tourist visit to India. The Indian women in question, apparently living in privation, "their skin dark and weathered, their smiles showing missing teeth" are "so wonderful" for no other reason than that they "had nothing, absolutely nothing" and yet "they were so happy" (149), even regardless of the implicit narrative of hardship in their "weathered" skins, "missing teeth" and the acknowledged indigence that, therefore, contradict an ascriptions of happiness. The described Indian women are elevated in Kimberly's view from across the racial divide in her position of white privilege aspiring that as a white woman she "might one day have [happiness]" (*Americanah* 164) to use the focal agent, Ifemelu's surmise of Kimberly's aspirations. In the narrative Kimberly and her sister, Laura, take for granted that America is necessarily endowed with such privilege that is metonymic of whiteness, since the black sector of American population is thought of as necessarily pathological because (in the words of Laura) they "have all those issues" (*Americanah* 168), an insinuation that black Americans are pathologically trapped in racial complexes. In a later assessment of Kimberly and her sister, Laura, Ifemelu confirms this aspiration when she sums them up as lacking in happiness in life:

Ifemelu watched them, so alike in their looks, and both unhappy people. But Kimberly's unhappiness was inward, unacknowledged, shielded by her desire for things to be as they should, and also by hope: she believed in other people's happiness because it meant that she, too, might one day have it. Laura's unhappiness was different, spiky, she wished that everyone around her were unhappy because she convinced herself that she would always be. (164)

Being happy and being a racial other, in Kimberly's eyes, are sufficient indices of sublime humanity in themselves, despite and notwithstanding the contradictory overlying narratives. From Ifemelu's reading of Kimberly's mind, it is clear that the latter's frame of mind, with respect to race, is in keeping with the tendency to suppress an acknowledgment of difference in racial phenotype as seen with the clothing store encounter that Ginika mischievously handles. As seen with the tense atmosphere in the classroom situation described above, America, through the eyes of Ifemelu, has cultivated a comfort zone in which races can relate by bracketing off perceived offensive descriptions and bracketing in those which elevate, especially in the eyes of the black about whom consensus indicate have endured "a lot of pain" and "hurt" (*Americanah* 137–38) because of historical race-related oppression. Rather than be silenced into the racial margins by this socially-correct benevolent elevation, Ifemelu questions this rigid, colour-blind scheme that erases markers of race, such as skin colour, by "naming [the]...

reality” of blackness and thereby thwart alienating effect of this failure to name (Delgado and Stefancic 44; Gillborn and Ladson-Billings 343). Arguably, in this context, this act of naming contributes in the apparent disassembling of the fragile comfort zone in race relations, for Kimberly “smiled, and Ifemelu would think of it as the moment they became, truly, friends” (*Americanah* 147), a smile that can be read as *touché* response to Ifemelu’s assault on the brittle racial calculations that Kimberly instinctively but obtrusively (at least in the eyes of Ifemelu) enter into inter-racial interactions.

Kimberly’s sister, Laura, is less subtle in her prejudiced hauteur, overly fixated with privileged whiteness that is either invisible to her or is consciously invoking it so as to affirm such as privileged position. Granted her privileged whiteness is invisible to her, from the focalising marginal position of black immigrant as Ifemelu, in sum her disposition is that of a “hawk, sharp-beaked and dark-minded” (*Americanah* 146). This is a positional observation because if this was Laura’s objective nature, Kimberly would be bound to keep distance from her (kinship notwithstanding) if only to avoid potential dark intentions from the latter. But Kimberly suggests a cordial relationship between herself and her sister as she informs Ifemelu that they “visit each other almost every day” (*Americanah* 146). This grasp primes us to regard her verbal and body language in interracial interactions as imbued with intentions which are racially injurious. Indeed, her amplification of Kimberly’s conversation with Ifemelu, her obtrusive conversational interpositions and inquisitiveness are all imbued with invalidating racial innuendos, what Pierce, et al term racial micro-aggression or “put-downs” (Pierce, et al, para 13). In virtually all her interactions with Ifemelu, there is glaring intention to inflict psychological injury on the latter as a racial Other, that is meant to put her down to the position designated for a black person in a discourse privileging the white colour. On learning that Ifemelu left Nigeria as a result of persistent lecturers’ strikes, she seizes upon this as a confirmation of her superior (White American) status, for “she nodded knowingly” and in a sweeping generalization, condemns all African countries on the basis of the shortcoming of lecturer’s strike in Nigeria: “Horrible, what’s going on in African countries” (*Americanah* 147). On Ifemelu’s failed joke about wide variety of cereal available on sale in the American supermarket, contrasted with the limited variety in Nigeria, Laura pounces on it as yet another affirmation of the lack she assigns to the racial other, which is supposed to be redeemed by the white American world. When Ifemelu jokes that she felt “dizzy” on being confronted with wide choice, “Laura laughed” and then quips: “I can see how you’d be dizzy!” (147). Implicit in this reaction is that Ifemelu is supposed to have been overwhelmed by liberating arrival in



America where access to basic sustenance is construed as unlimitedly available, rather than that it was a question of the breadth of choice as Ifemelu intended to imply. This racial micro-aggression is subsequently made even more blatant, egged on by Kimberly's self-mortifying accommodation of Ifemelu's well-meant joke:

"Yes, we're really about excess in this country," Kimberly said. "I'm sure back home you ate a lot of wonderful organic food and vegetable, but you're going to see it's different here." "Kim, if she was eating all this wonderful organic food in Nigeria, why would she come to the US?" Laura asked. (147)

To Laura, therefore, Ifemelu as an African immigrant is necessarily a destitute refugee affirmed as such through Laura's own a selective processing of Ifemelu's utterances. In another case of racial micro-aggression, Laura presents to Ifemelu and Kimberly a photograph of a celebrity white woman captured with African children in a magazine:

"Ifemelu and Kimberly looked at the page together: a thin white woman, smiling at the camera, holding a dark-skinned African baby in her arms, and all around her, little dark-skinned African children were spread out like a rug." [(162)

In the words of David Gillborn, whiteness of the celebrity woman, "is thrown into relief" (320) against the background of blackness, marked by the skinny black children, a fact that Laura micro-aggressively seizes upon against Ifemelu. To Laura, the import of the photograph is in its presenting a white woman, but whose phenomenality is made possible against the black, malnourished children. Laura's "dark-mindedness" that Ifemelu has already noted, can be identified in the fact that her happiness is found in and nourished by her indulgence in her privileged whiteness at the expense of the racial Other. In the case of the photograph, she vicariously savours the privileged whiteness illuminated by the black malnourished children in the photograph. In her way of seeing, she takes no notice of the black children, beyond perceiving them as objects of the scene animating the whiteness and charity of the celebrity woman. On the other hand, from the focal angle of Ifemelu who inhabits the margins of the American world, and to whom the picture stands out as a text in which African children are rendered metonymic of "a rug"<sup>21</sup> upon which stands a human being defined as such by Caucasian attributes. When Ifemelu points out the contrast between the African children and the white woman in the picture, Laura bursts into a gleeful laughter:

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<sup>21</sup> Thus lesser humans, if at all they are humans.



“She is stunning too,” Laura said.

“Yes, she is,” Ifemelu said. “And she’s just as skinny as the kids, only that her skinniness is by choice and theirs is not by choice.”

A pop of laughter burst out from Laura. “You *are* funny! I love how sassy you are!” (162)

That Ifemelu’s fingers at the textuality inherent in the photograph that reify and dignify invisible whiteness is a relishable moment for Laura who marks it with “a pop of laughter”. She also derives immediate gratification as a privileged white woman in displaying the illumined whiteness in the magazine images to Ifemelu, a black Other imagined as worse or probably better, but in any way “close” to the images in the magazine photograph (160). Ruth Frankenberg writes that “[w]hiteness comes to self-name ... simply through a triumphant ‘I am not that’” (quoted in Applebaum 40). Arguably this is what is in effect as Laura stakes her whiteness by means of the black Other constructed as lacking in well-being.

### **The exceptional but invalidated black**

In another case of execution of micro-insult, Laura draws Ifemelu’s attention to her child’s new doctor, a Nigerian man that she says is “the most charming Nigerian man” (*Americanah* 167). Laura exudes charitable feelings about the black doctor. She speaks of him as being “wonderful, so well-groomed and so well-spoken” in addition to elevating him to the bracket of the “well-educated immigrant group” (*Americanah* 168). In the same ungrudging spirit, she is resolved to have the Nigerian as her child’s doctor in preference to another doctor, a Dr. Bingham, whom she claims, in a plain tone, that she hadn’t “been really very satisfied with” (*Americanah* 168). In the context of aversive racism, Dovidio, Gaertner and Pearse have described this as “prosocial” behaviour which entails a self-censorship in social behaviour in contexts where such behaviour is in full public view, a censorship that is elicited by guilt (Dovidio et al. 271; Pearson et al. 6). Laura’s differential preference for the Nigerian doctor rather than a white one manifest this prosociality.

But as with other interactions between Ifemelu and Laura, racial micro-aggression abound. First, it is notable that Laura bestows distinction on the black doctor, even entrusting the health of her child to him. It is also notable that the doctor from whom she is switching her child is highly likely a white man for having not attracted her superlative prosocial description as she is want to describe a black person. The distinction that Laura bestows on the black doctor is, however, fenced off, even negated

by her pointing out that the distinction is only with reference to other immigrants, who in turn are subjects of privilege, generously availed to them by the white race she represents:

I read on the Internet that Nigerians are the most educated immigrant group in this country. Of course, it says nothing about the millions who live on less than a dollar a day back in your country, but I met the doctor I thought of that article and of you and other privileged Africans who are *here in this country*." Laura paused and Ifemelu, as she often did, felt that Laura had more to say but was holding it back. (Adichie 167-68)

....  
Laura picked up the menu again. "In graduate school I knew of a woman from Africa who was just like this doctor I think she was from Uganda. She was wonderful, and she didn't get along with the African American woman in our class at all. She didn't have all those issues" (Adichie 168)

The distinction bestowed on blackness thus does not only dissolve as Laura conjures up imagined circumstances of his country of origin, Nigeria, compounding it with his immigrant status, but is at once cancelled off by destitution that is assigned to him and by extension, to Ifemelu who receives it as racial micro-assault. The same excellence extended to the Uganda woman is also invalidated by the same racialised African horizon that secures Laura's whiteness. Her utterance drawing in the African American woman is also revealing enough about her insensitivity to the blight of racism that bear on African Americans as a historical weight. Her reference to African Americans' psychic burden of racism as "those issues" has three implications. First, it does not only diminish or invalidate this burden of experience but also, secondly, it pathologizes the experiencing of racism, in effect reducing the oppressed black people as essentially (rather than constructedly) psychopathological population. Thirdly, to the extent that the "issues" are given distal relegation from the speaking white self as "those issues" (as opposed to the possible implicative proximal alternative "these issues") whiteness is effaced or absolved, as a force of interest, from the issues experienced by black people. That the African American woman in question had "issues" is the condition for the distinction, negated at the same time, of the Ugandan woman. It is also noteworthy that Laura finds an ally in the Uganda woman she refers to, evidently because the latter was at odds with the African American woman who is supposed to be beset with pathological issues. Apparently smarting from the layered offence, Ifemelu offers a riposte that is significant in reconfiguring her relation with Laura:

"May be when the African American's father was not allowed to vote because he was black, the Ugandan's father was running for parliament or studying in Oxford," Ifemelu said.

Laura stared at her, made a mocking confused face. "Wait, did I miss something?" (Americanah 168).

The utter astonishment she experiences can be explained as a realization of her own aversive racism that Ifemelu uncovers through conjuring up the historical racial discrimination against the blacks, which she comprehends as the locus of the “issues” the African American woman is supposed to have had. In chapter four this shock will be examined for its implication in formation of Ifemelu’s radical subjectivity from within this confrontation with Laura.

### **Race as class**

As her life unfolds and as she grows more and more discerning and combative in racial encounters, Ifemelu begins to appreciate the multi-faceted nature of racism. While working as babysitter for the Turners, she is confronted with another dimension of racial structuring of the American society. A carpet cleaner, a working class white man, arrives at the door and as it is opened for him:

He stiffened when he saw her. First surprise flitted over his features, then it ossified to hostility.

“You need a carpet cleaned?” he asked, as if he did not care, as if she could change her mind. She looked at him, a taunt in her eyes, prolonging a moment loaded with assumptions: he thought she was a homeowner, and she was not what he had expected to see in this grand stone house with white pillars. (Adichie 166)

The cleaner’s instinctive body language eloquently displays aggression towards Ifemelu for being an incongruous occupant, probably even an owner, of a stately house expected to be a marker of whiteness. At his first note of her at the door, he is assailed by her appearance which, gauging from his body language again, is supposed to be an inconsistency. The signifier as the subject of his cleaning services (the stately house) suddenly slips from its normal signified (a white woman). It should be noted here that at this point in the narrative, the cleaner could possibly have been presented as apologetic on realising his own mistake in locating the house he was to do the cleaning. The narrative choice to have him maintain certainty of the correctness of location address fits into the scheme where the focal agent (Ifemelu) is supposed to orient us to prevalence of racist attitudes in America. As a minority black woman, propped by her bold personality, Ifemelu lets the cleaner go through the recoiling at the thought of working for a black woman. However, there is a conviction in his body language that he had the correct address and evinces an impression that the occupant he found was not the right one, justified on the basis of his racial scheme, and for this reason he had the instinctive right as a white man to accost the racial outsider intruding into a superior class indicated by the “grand

stone house with white pillars” (Americanah 166). Ifemelu as a black woman, in his eyes has sullied the precincts of whiteness and thus seized by hostility towards her.

### **Objectified female body**

One of the most debilitating of oppressive encounters Ifemelu experiences relates to objectification of woman’s body that attend immigrants’ opportunity structure on physically arriving in America. This encounter marks the *nadir* of her difficult quest to find a footing in the new world, testing the limits of her strength and determination as black, woman, and immigrant, intersectional identity structure that define her marginality. Her body constantly merges with objects of male desire against her quest for economic wellbeing. Martha C. Nussbaum terms this commensurateness of woman’s body with other objects as fungibility (257). This merging plays out in Ifemelu’s encounter with the Ardmore tennis coach, an embodiment of physical and sexual masculinity as his body was a “glut of muscles” and his visual consumption of her body as a sexual object (“he looked her over, mercilessly sizing her up”) (Americanah 143). The coach justifies his need for intimate consumption of her body as an alternative to substance abuse: “I don’t do drugs, so I figured I need help to relax, you know” (144). Since he cannot, as a matter of choice or as a result of legal surveillance, use a drug (a substance) to achieve a state of relaxation, and in his androcentric perspective he has an alternative in another object (Ifemelu’s body) which affords the same pleasure that he seeks. Incidentally also, as Nussbaum again would to put it, he appropriates her body as an instrument for his own pleasure(257). To this male character, therefore, Ifemelu’s body and drugs are fungible. This objectification stands out even more as he foregrounds his own androcentric subjectivity without regard for that of Ifemelu, which from her circumstance as an African student immigrant and a woman, we appreciate as distressed and unsettled. His repeated urge, (the need to relax, and therefore attain pleasure) overwrites her own unpleasure which he erases in objectifying her. This need to objectify women, it is starkly visible from Ifemelu’s focal position of marginality where she is contending with precarious existence, is not limited to the encounter with Ifemelu (143). From this precarious intersectional location where the man is focalised, a multiplication of the coach’s oppression become visible even in relation to the unnamed women that have passed through the his remarked corrupt morality:

There was something venal about his thin-lipped face; he had the air of a man to whom corruption was familiar. (143)

....

He had said this to many other women, she could tell, from the measured pace with which the words came out. He was not a kind man. (144)

The corruption and unkindness seen by Ifemelu, in this objectification can be understood as the man's display of masculine entitlement to a woman's body, which he can abuse (in the sense of substance abuse) without affective attachment and therefore disposable in the same disposing way he gestured her out of his room:

"Can you do twice a week? I'll cover your train fare," he said, stretching and dismissive; he wanted her to leave.  
She said nothing.  
"Shut the door," he said, and turned his back to her. (154)

In another case of objectification, the male guest (evidently white) attending a fundraiser at the Turners' makes an objectifying remark about Ifemelu as an African woman. If the tennis coach finds Ifemelu and drugs fungible as instruments for his relaxation, this guest's remarks lessens her nature to fetishised gaze, a process Rae Langton grasps as "a reduction to appearance" (quoted in Papadaki, para. 1): "You're so beautiful," a man told her, smiling, his teeth jarringly white. "African women are gorgeous, especially Ethiopians." (169). This happens in front of the gathering, who for the most part are middle class Americans constricted by this class's mannerisms:

They were similar, all of them, their clothes nice and safe, their sense of humour nice and safe, and, like other middle-class Americans, they used the word "wonderful" too often.  
(*Americanah* 169)

The man's qualification of the African women as "especially Ethiopians," rather than any African woman, aggravates the assaulting and offensiveness of the objectifying gaze, considering she is not Ethiopian, thus foreclosing any question about her appearance. If the man's observation is intended to redeem bodies of African women as generally "gorgeous" (its objectifying undertones notwithstanding), the case of Ifemelu's is invalidated given she does not happen to be Ethiopian woman. There is a hint, in the editorialists excerpt from Ifemelu's blog, that Ethiopian women appear favourable to white Americans because of their lighter skin tone relative to other Africans, a general evaluation the Ethiopians ironically seem to find gratifying: "... what is it with Ethiopians thinking they are not black?" (*Americanah* 214). As the guests do not find this degrading comment objectionable (there being no capture of offence among the rest of the guests by the focalising agent) then to this extent they are morally implicated in the degradation of her personhood and a further indication of

white American's insensitivity to feelings of people of colour. If anything, this humiliation, coupled with these guest's patronising attitudes towards her being from Africa, foment internal agony in her and, instinctively, as if to escape from this psychologically suffocating oppressiveness, "[s]he went out to the deck in search of fresh air" (*Americanah* 170). As seen with racial micro aggression above, the guest's racially nullifying remarks convey indirect disparagement of Ifemelu as a black woman. But given Ifemelu's characteristic trait of boldly confronting what is adverse to her, dating back her nature in Nigeria, these micro aggressions serve as fodder for this bold determination to carve for herself a space as black woman the racially adverse American world.

### **Claiming space: dynamics and mechanisms of migrant embedding in *Americanah***

The description of the foundational social network ties and the specific nature of relations in those ties among the key characters in *Americanah*, has allowed an articulation of the transnational dislocations of those characters pivotal in establishment of transnational structure. Also, the elaboration of prevailing societal characteristics of the receiving locality, has permitted a glimpse into social and personal dilemmas, personal anguish and corresponding countering, through Ifemelu's consciousness as a marginal individual. To complete this outline of transnational contours in the texts, I aver here (with Louise Ryan and Janine Dahinden) that despite adverse social conditions in receiving end of the migration circle that meets the arriving characters, these characters make bold moves to forge points of establishment and bases of belonging within the social matrix of their new homes. In other words, we examine the characters' "engagement with the people and places that make up their social world"(L. Ryan 235) in the process of negotiating for a space in America. Louise Ryan reminds us that migrants' establishment in a locality as embedding, a la Dahinden, or establishing anchorage and grounds for belonging within host social structure(Dahinden, 'Dynamics of Migrant Transnational Formations' 51), is a dynamic process involving continuous negotiation, hence his preference for dynamism carried in the term embedding(235).

An obvious indication of insertion in receiving system is Ifemelu's admission in American college. Having gained such admission to study communication accords her a claim to educational space though not to social and physical space. Administratively, the school offers her an opportunity, a

scholastic space documented by the admission letter. But she is not offered a residential space and has to personally claim it by committing herself to occupancy lease with the proprietor (*Americanah* 127). Similarly, social space is not offered, for example, in the form of mentor or an individual who would offer her basic orientation, as if to suggest she is expected to navigate it personally. Presumably, she intends to complete her education in the US, after which she would return to Nigeria, but American education credentials, when she finally obtains them are as acceptable in the US as they would even be more so in Nigeria (the reverse is true of Auntie Uju as her Nigerian medical training is not recognised in the US). Her education thus creates more “in-place career opportunities” (Ryan 240) local to America and therefore more opportunity for embedding. This is where a link can be drawn between her schooling and her impatience and refusal to conform to prevailing social norm. In school she attends media and history classes, including voraciously reading books about America and its history, implying that she has a chance to understand the social dynamics that have punctuated the American social and political landscape, especially racism. Out of her argument with her white American lover, Curt, about race and media, from her general experience and with encouragement from the Kenyan, fellow student and immigrant, Wambui, she sets up the blog where she would write about experience of racism. A combination of these three elements forms the components for her embedding. Academic pursuits offer an eye-opener on America’s racial history as her personal experience gives a first-hand apprehension of this. Her impatience at white Americans’ blindness to existing racism and tabooed racial openness sees her deploy her streak for social activism. Since in the narrative there is no significant native American anti-racial activist presented, Ifemelu, arguably steps in to fill this gap as popularity of her blog grows. As it grows, her activism attracts international attention as readership statistics on the blog shows this “increased, by the thousands from all over the world” (*Americanah* 303). American public increasingly become drawn in, including “a corporation in Pennsylvania” inviting her “to lead their annual diversity workshop” (*Americanah* 304), a prep school inviting her to “speak to students on diversity” (*Americanah* 304), and a magazine request to her to be included in their “Ten People to Watch feature” (*Americanah* 304), and even “more invitations came” (*Americanah* 304). Symbolically, Ifemelu also receives requests to embed the blog in other online marketing websites, mainly those involved in women fashion and beauty products. Financial support for the blog and its cause also stream in. In short, in her blogging she finally achieves belonging as the wider American public own her up as a backbone of their social diversity structure. This is despite

persistence of substantial quarters of them denying racism, affirming the continual nature of embedding as a process, an unceasing engagement and negotiation. The troublemaker and nonconformist Nigerian woman thus finds an American niche in which her innate personality is both socially and politically implemented and complemented.

## Conclusion

This chapter was motivated by the need to locate the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie within a context saturated by impact of intensified mobilities, social and physical, that has seen social activity, involving mobile and non-mobile persons, operating across and beyond territorial boundaries. The aim was to demonstrate, through an analysis of the narratives in *Americanah*, 'Imitation', 'Tomorrow is Too Far' and 'Arrangers of Marriage', the socio-political dynamics which draw character relations into a transnational formation. As illustrated from *Americanah*, the narrative makes visible the dynamics and mechanisms that produce and sustain transnational formations. The analysis substantiated that social relations presented in the narrative span territorial boundaries but are, at the same time, located spatially. The analysis of departure context showed that familial setting, and the social norms that structure it is seminal in the development of transnational space through subsequent migration of those brought together in that familial space. In addition to this familial relationships, Ifemelu's friends network established while schooling in Nigeria prove pivotal in producing culture of migration, where a chain of these friends emigrate thus establishing initial contact points abroad that make possible Ifemelu's later migration and settlement. Further to this, as characteristic of transnational formation, it was also shown that characters, as Ifemelu, dovetail into the American social and communal matrix through socio-political contestation, establishing herself a legitimate space as an African migrant. Through romantic relations she enters into once she has settled in America, she finds an entry point into American society, within which she engage in destabilising normative structures underlying race relations, further entrenching herself in American society. This entrenchment in America deepens even further as she gets American citizenship, enabling her to have a dual national belonging, as Nigerian and as American.

Analysis of the three short stories, 'Imitation', 'The Arrangers of Marriage' and 'Tomorrow is Too Far', also demonstrated that the institutions of marriage and family are a subject of transnational



processes, especially in the light of social dynamics in both Nigeria and in America. 'Imitation' centres gender dynamics in Nigeria and America as motivation for transnational dispersal of family members. On the other hand 'Tomorrow is Too Far' reveals the possible challenges that attend transnationally dispersed family unit, given the pervasive, rather than differential gender characteristics of the transnational environment. 'Arrangers of Marriage' exposes the pitfalls of the culture of marriage arrangement within a context where partners are transnationally dispersed, and as such, a context entails differential gender dynamics. The narrative indicates that these differential gender dynamics are exploited by the partners in different ways depending on the interest of each one of them. Beside the aim of illustrating how Adichie's texts delineate a transnational cartography, a token gesture was also made towards the potentials of this transnational space in re-orienting ways of seeing as evident in how the worlds, events and other characters are focalised in the narratives. This token observation was made here with the forward look on the task earmarked for chapter four. In this chapter, structures of identification in Nigeria were approached as those governing the migrant characters' frame of mind as they depart Nigeria and on arrival in America. The next chapter embarks on delineating these structures of identification that not only determine characters' sense of who they are, but also regulate their self-conduct within the spaces they inhabit before they leave Nigeria.

## Chapter Three: Socio-Political Problematics of Adichie's Nigerian Fictional Universe

### Introduction

This chapter explores the prevailing values, ideas and attitudes at the social and political contexts of departure for the focalizing agents in Nigeria. By context, reference is made to the depicted communities, their characteristic worldview as reflected in their social and political practices and the modes by which the communality is reproduced. In this chapter the overarching argument is that Adichie's focalization choices in the two texts in focus are strategic in staging crucial questions about the Nigerian society. Towards this argument, Levitt's conception of normative structures, systems of practice and social capital (*The Transnational Villagers* 59; 'Social Remittances' 933) are brought to bear on the analysis of *Hibiscus* and the short story 'The American Embassy'. Levitt applies these three terms to conceptualize the facets of social remittances that migrants transmit to their communities of origin. Normative structures encompass ideas, values and attitudes, whereas systems of practice suggest social action emanating from socio-political locations determined by the structuring effect of the normative structures. Social capital points at the system of sanctioning individual behaviour within a community as an entity within which interdependence of the members is essential. 'The American Embassy' expands on a thematic fragment that in *Hibiscus* is treated as subject of allegory. The short story offers a close up of the fraught psychological terrain of victim of military excess that *Hibiscus* through the one of its characters (the Cokers) only makes a figurative gesture at. These concepts are seized upon in approaching these contexts of departure, since the assumption is that migrants depart and return or relate to their source communities with existing normative structures and systems of practice, which themselves are social sites for what is socially remitted.

*Hibiscus* sets precedence in relation to the rest of narratives in the oeuvre in terms of publication chronology as Adichie's first major work, experimentation with narrative structure and focalization, and in terms of thematic concerns given treatment in the oeuvre. Udumukwu rightly observes that, relative to Adichie's other works, *Hibiscus* provides a paradigmatic engagement with forces operative in the fictional Nigerian world that emerge in Adichie's fiction, most notably patriarchal violence (184) and the state totalitarianism. As will be demonstrated in the chapter, the focalization schema creates a

foundation for the more experimental manipulations in later texts, especially in *Americanah* and *HYS*. Similarly, *Hibiscus* assembles the thematic motifs that are refined, reconfigured or magnified in those later narratives. These motific elements include gender expectations, parenting (especially the paternal aspect of it), failure or cannibalism of the state and related injustices, as well as the motif of migration. Also, the narrative in *Hibiscus* gives a more expansive treatment from the focal angle of an untraveled narrator, Kambili, of communal contexts in Nigeria, with only a marginal narration of border-crossing that is given intricate development in *Americanah*, while being taken for granted in *HYS*.

The novel discourses on these characteristics at a breadth, length and focal stance that allow adequate and strategic multidimensional examination of the socio-political structuring of the Nigerian contexts, relevant for understanding social remittance. It is strategic in the sense that there is a better opportunity for analytic mining of social values, attitudes, practices and social capital, as focalized through Kambili, and as these are imposed on her, as an impressionable young girl. Corinne Sandwith shares this view when she argues that the first person stance provides “a focalizing perspective that gives insistent, uneasy, and concentrated attention to the attitudes and attributes of the human body” (96). For Sandwith the human body in *Hibiscus* is used as a stand-in for “postcolonial potentate” (95; also Udumukwu 189–90), implying that *Hibiscus* presents the intimate bodily violence within domestic space as tangential critique of what Achille Mbembe terms *commandement* (state’s rationality that centres violence as the *modus operandi* and where right is annulled), (Sandwith 102–03). The figure of the minor in Adichie’s generation of writers, Madelaine Hron contends, is a particularly fitting medium for these writers to project the Nigerian world against the prevailing backdrop of multiculturalism, globalization and the attendant expansion of human rights awareness (28). Adichie’s contemporaries such as Helen Oyeyemi (in *The Icarus Girl*), NoViolet Bulawayo (in *We Need New Names*), Nadiffa Mohamed (in *Black Mamba Boy*), and Helon Habila (in *Measuring Time*) have also adopted a minor’s perspective. Oyeyemi’s child character, Jessamy, is born of a Nigerian mother and a British father and therefore a child of two worlds who struggles with psychotic tendencies. Bulawayo’s young girl, Darling, presents a child’s view of political ferment in Zimbabwe at the turn of the millennium. Habila’s *Measuring Time* features two twin boys, also growing up amidst negligent and heavy-handed father, as each seeks personal liberation. Mohamed focuses on the odyssey of the ten year old boy, Jama, in his search for his father. Childhood in the African world, Hron points out, “is always intrinsically enmeshed in a cultural and

social community”<sup>22</sup>(29) rendering the perspective of a child figure in the works of these writers ideal for revealing the intricacies of Nigerian society and culture. Hron sums up that this life stage as a space of transitioning to adulthood comes up as a hybrid interstice where “the child, figured as not yet a (civilized) adult becomes initiated to relations of power, social discourse and their embodied practices” (29). Thus, Kambili’s malleable cognitive and social outlook, as will be demonstrated, lays bare the normative structures and systems of practice, in a process foregrounded in the narrative where these are inculcated in her by her tyrannical father.

The short story ‘The American Embassy’ is co-opted in this chapter because, as pointed out above, it has a close narrative and thematic kinship with *Hibiscus* in the sense that its setting, (as “the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place” (M.-L. Ryan paragraph 7)) is confined to Nigeria despite the fact that the US is brought to the horizon. As it will subsequently become clear in this chapter, the narrative in the short story is a theme-and-variation of that of the story of the Cokers in *Hibiscus*, dispersed and summarized within the first two-thirds of the novel (*Hibiscus* up to Ade Coker’s burial in page 207). Both texts present a scenario where a member of the family dies in the hands of the military regime. For the Cokers it is the husband and in ‘The American Embassy’ the husband narrowly escapes a similar fate, but it is the child who is killed. ‘The American Embassy’ thus provides a zooming in on details which *Hibiscus* gestures at through the allegory of the repressive domestic sphere. With respect to focalization, particularly on how this aspect is strategic for the purpose of exploring salient normative structures and systems of practice in the short story, the deployment of a woman’s perspective fosters Adichie’s interest in foregrounding the vulnerabilities of women within the phallogentric Nigeria state. The narrative constructs that men are capable of extricating themselves from predicaments related to the phallogentric state system (the unnamed woman protagonists’ husband escapes apprehension by soldiers). On the other hand this narrative affirms that not only are women trapped within the phallogentric excesses, but they have to bear the brunt of such excesses. The focal angle of the traumatized woman thus serves to accentuate the prevailing phallogentric excesses and hence situating this short story in this chapter for the purposes of revealing the prevalent normative structures and systems of practice in Nigeria is apt.

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<sup>22</sup>This comparison of childhoods in African and Western worlds is offered by Kanchana Ugabe who argues that in generic Western world childhood signals “... a certain ‘primitivism’ before one is circumscribed and crippled by social mores” (quoted in Hron 29).

For convenience in cataloguing the socio-political features for purpose of analysis, socio-political structuring will be approached from three angles, each corresponding to the major concerns in the “narrative universe” (M.-L. Ryan paragraph 10) constituted by Adichie’s body of work.<sup>23</sup> The approach starts with interrogation of narrative presentation of norm(s) of familial space, then related to this, explore the subjectivity of women, both within marital frame and in the wider societal frame. On a wider scale, an examination will be done of state’s emasculative control. The aim here is not to explore the narrator’s political engagement or disengagement with the forces of domination and subjugation in those spaces and frames, but rather to describe, on as is basis, the socio-political milieu as focalized and, fundamentally, as lived through by the focalizing character in *Hibiscus* and ‘The American Embassy’.

The narrative in *Hibiscus* is founded on a paradox of a father, Eugene Achike, who requires his family of three (his wife, Beatrice, his teenage daughter and focalising agent, Kambili Achike, and the teenage son, Jaja) to submit to his repressive Catholic fundamentalism yet does not countenance Nigeria’s military regime’s repressive autocratic practices, fighting these through the newspaper outlet, *Standard*, which he owns. Eugene is also a wealthy man involved in a number of charities, associated with the church but also funds the education of many around him. Because of his strict Catholicism, he despises traditional Igbo culture which he counts as heathen. For this reason he sees his own father, Papa-Nnukwu, as a lesser being because he practices Igbo traditional religious observances. The story, however, does not so much dwell on contrastive perception of religious positions as it does of the impact of this Catholicism on himself, his family and the extended family. The narrative discourse presents in four parts, starting with an episode during a Palm Sunday that marks a turning point in relationships within Eugene’s family, aptly evoked in the title of the section, “Breaking Gods” and presaged in the section’s first sentence hinting that “[t]hings started to fall apart at home when ... Jaja,

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<sup>23</sup>Marie-Laurie Ryan distinguishes between layers of narrative space (embracing Buchholz and Jahn’s (2005) definition of narrative space as “physically existing environment in which characters live and move”(M.-L. Ryan paragraph 5)) as spatial frame (“shifting scenes of action”(M.-L. Ryan paragraph 6)), setting (“the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place”(paragraph 7)), story space (“consists of all the spatial frames plus all the locations mentioned by the text that are not the scene of actually occurring events”(paragraph 8)) narrative or story world (“the story space completed by the reader’s imagination on the basis of cultural knowledge and real world experience”(paragraph 9)) and narrative universe which is “the world ... presented as actual by the text, plus all the counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams, and fantasies”(paragraph 10))

did not go to communion” (*Hibiscus* 3). In effect, the narrative starts *in medias res*<sup>24</sup> after which the narrative reverts to the beginning of the story as the section sub-titled “Before Palm Sunday” when Kambili, Jaja and their mother bore the brunt of Eugene’s violence in silence, conjured up in the way the section is titled (“Speaking with our Spirits”) (*Hibiscus* 17). The third section is titled “The Pieces of gods” and sub-titled “After Palm Sunday” alluding to irrevocable shattering of Eugene’s authority, matched with emergence of Jaja’s and Kambili’s agency (or shattering of bondage imposed on them by Eugene and Catholic doctrine. The last section designated “A Different Silence” and sub-titled “The Present” presents the denouement, where acceptance of the tragic conclusion of years of repression, marked by the death of Eugene, mental breakdown of Beatrice, and a brave resolve by Jaja to admit to having a hand in his father’s death so as to save his mother time in prison for homicide. Kambili resiliently gathers her way through this grim, yet inevitable end.

Violence and fear pervade Beatrice and her children’s lives. Behind closed doors, Eugene constantly batters Beatrice, who keeps it to herself. Through subtle implicatures Beatrice has several miscarriages which are associated with this battery. Despite this however, she does not have the audacity to walk out of this marriage because out of patriarchal subjection, woman’s marriage, child bearing and subservience to man are marked out as the only paths and avenues for woman’s dignity. In this patriarchal trap Beatrice wonders aloud to Ifeoma one day while the former’s family travels to Abba rural home for Christmas: ““...A woman with children and no husband, what is that?”” suggesting by this that ““... A husband crowns a woman’s life” (*Hibiscus* 75). At the end of it, as a measure of the extremity of violence she had endured and arguably having no feasible alternatives, it emerges that she has been plotting to commit homicide (of which she succeeds) by lacing Eugene’s tea with poison.

Adichie opts to project this repressive atmosphere, both at home and in Nigeria as whole, through the consciousness of Kambili, who is at the threshold of adulthood. As the focalising agent, she bears the brunt of her father’s domestic cruelty which has far-reaching impact on her psychological development. Through his intense disciplinary surveillance, her worldview is severely curtailed or conditioned by his strict domestic code. As survival strategy in the face of this oppressive control of their father, she has nurtured a silent commune with her brother, Jaja, as well as with her mother

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<sup>24</sup> In narratology, the chronology of events in the story can be disrupted in variety of ways. *In medias res* is an example of such disruption where the reader is plunged into the middle of the story rather than the narrative presentation commencing from chronological beginning, usually marked by exposition (see Bal 83–84).

where, as she puts it, they “spoke more with our spirits than with our lips” (*Hibiscus* 16) which suggest that “[t]hey are deprived of any outlet for emotional life except for themselves” (Okuyade, ‘Changing Borders’ 249). But her grasp of what is going on around her is still inchoate though nonetheless she suffers psychologically as a result of it. The world constructed in the narrative is thus projected through her naïve but troubled consciousness. However, when one day they go visiting their aunt, Ifeoma (Eugene’s sister) at Nsukka where domestic atmosphere (characterised by unencumbered geniality and rational freedom) is a diametric opposite of that at their Enugu home. Henceforth, a pivotal release from the totalising constriction of their father is realized, and hence the novel’s opening sentence that indicate that, henceforth, “[t]hings started to fall apart at home” (*Hibiscus* 3). After their visit to Ifeoma, Kambili witnesses, even as she also experiences, an upsurge of “a different kind of freedom .... A freedom to be, to do” especially as she notices this in her brother, Jaja (*Hibiscus* 16).

In attending to familial dynamics set in a parallel relationship with national dynamics, and as these are conveyed through juvenile consciousness, *Hibiscus* offers a fitting medium through which to grasp the prevailing normative values and conduct as Adichie’s thematic *topos* in her oeuvre. But even as the novel keenly attends to familial and national dynamics, it also discursively engages gender dynamics, especially as these plays out at Kambili’s home. This analysis begins with gender dimensions in the narrative.

## Gendered subjectivities

*Hibiscus* reflects the positioned gender relations in the represented narrative universe. The narrative weaves the story of familial relationship into that of gender subjectivity, in which men and women assume fixed roles defined by their subject positions within the wider determining patriarchal discourse. Subject position is used here to gesture towards the implied author’s<sup>25</sup> political statement concerning the operation of patriarchy in the novel’s narrative universe. However, the aim is not to outline the implied author’s feminist critique of that universe, but rather to describe the immanent positions that men and women are relegated in the projected patriarchal universe. In this sense, I embrace Davies and Harre’s explanation that “a subject position incorporates both a conceptual

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<sup>25</sup> Implied author is Wayne Booth’s term referring to the discursive principle that “establishes the norms of the narrative” (Chatman 149) and “instructs us silently, through the design of the whole [narrative], with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn” (148).



repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire.” (Davies and Harré, para.8). By conceptual repertoire, Davies and Harre suggest an ensemble of ways of apprehending the world. The ensemble arise from a configuration of rights (social, political, cultural rights, to name but a few), that apply unequally to positions distributed within a given discourse. As Davis and Harre aptly put it:

Once having taken up a particular position as one’s own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. (para.8)

On this conceptual basis, this section sets out to examine characters as positioned subjectivities within the patriarchal discourse that inform the narrative in *Hibiscus*. This exploration acknowledges the gendered subject position of Kambili, as focalizer, and at the same time adopting her as a narrative lens through which the characters as gendered subjectivities are presented to us. Before embarking on this task, it is essential to point out the distinction between the object of focalization in the familial space as explored above, and that in the patriarchal system to be presently explored here. In concurrence with Sandwith, familial space is presented in a manner that indicates a focalizer keen on “meticulous” detailing, contrasting with the presentation of space outside of which is “shadowy and unspecified” (95). Whereas the focalized father-daughter relation is intelligible to Kambili, the gendered subjectivities, both within the domestic space and outside of it, are relatively unintelligible to her. In other words, as a subject of patriarchy, her position remains naturalized and as such evades her attention though she does not evade the socio-psychological consequences of it that then reveals the deleterious working of patriarchy.

The first indication of gendered distinction appears in the context of Eugene’s provision of education opportunities to his children. Early in the novel, through Kambili’s matter-of-fact statement that, after regular school time, Jaja was sent to the “new gifted students program” at St. Nicholas” (*Hibiscus* 22), where he attends remedial classes. In the statement ensuing after this, there is the faintest indication that there is differential treatment of the two siblings: “Papa had revised his schedule but not mine” (*Hibiscus* 22). Implicitly, we perceive Kambili’s apprehension of an inconsistency in which she anticipates similar revision of her schedule. There rings a note of innocence as a young girl who is given this treatment yet she expects a similar treatment. That she mentions this as a minor fact in



order to explain why she no longer has lunch at the same time with Jaja, and that she seems remotely aware that Jaja is attending remedial lessons because of being supposedly gifted than her, lend a poignant quality to her innocent voice. Through Kambili we learn that Jaja comes top in his class “as usual, so Papa would be proud, would hug Jaja, leave his arm resting around Jaja’s shoulders” (*Hibiscus* 39). Figuring her adored father bestow acts of approval on Jaja, as hugging and having a loving arm around his shoulders for performing well in school, evidently leave a strong impact on her and a feeling that she is a loser, especially being aware at that moment that unlike Jaja, she has been relegated to the second position in her class. The narrative presentation of this sense of loss inheres in the construction of the sentence “Papa would be proud, would hug Jaja, leave his arm resting around Jaja’s shoulders” in which the parallel clauses “Papa would be proud,” “would hug Jaja,” “leave his arm resting around Jaja’s shoulders” represent an instinctive emphasis in her consciousness of what she has lost, namely the loss of academic lustre, a loss which to her is a foregone loss of paternal appreciation starkly magnified by display of the same to her brother. Arguably, the sense of inadequacy that afflict her partly arises from this gendered treatment collaboratively effected by schooling and by the “good home training” of her father. Her report of her position in her class reflects a conception of herself as marked for condemnation. From the manner she conveys the report, in generic and categorical sentences, there is a hint that she perceives her class ranking as an inalterable branding and condemnation, a sentencing delivered in a quasi-judicial manner by the Reverend Sisters: “The Reverend Sisters gave us our cards unsealed. I came second in my class. It was written in figures: “2/25.”” (*Hibiscus* 38 quotation in the original). The reference to the Sisters’ act of unsealing the report cards suggests a feeling of violation through exposure of her inadequacy. Later on this sense of inadequacy is embodied when her father takes her to her school purposely to make her compare her head to that of Chinwe Jideze, the girl who beat her to position one in the class ranking. Here she is awakened to a possibility of the absurdity of her body that is supposed to account for her failure:

“Where is Chinwe Jideze?” Papa asked, when we got to the front of my class.  
 ....  
 “Look at her,” Papa said. “How many heads does she have?”  
 ....  
 Papa pulled a small mirror, the size of a powder compact, from his pocket. “Look in the mirror.”  
 I stared at him.  
 “Look in the mirror.”  
 I took the mirror, peered at it  
 “How many heads do you have, *gbo?*” Papa asked, speaking Igbo for the first time.

“One”(Hibiscus 46–47)

Even taking into consideration the note of surprise occasioned by a seemingly obvious question from her father, by staring at him, rather than provide a similarly obvious answer, there is a sense of doubt and bafflement evoked by the statement, carried onto her answer “One” which again by its one-word bare minimum, bears uncertainty about its correctness. She is confronted by a stark possibility that she is not one-headed. Gender discrimination therefore has a far-reaching implication for Kambili both within home and outside of it. Her dismal performance in school and troubled self-esteem is aggravated by the faint sense of inadequacy remotely set off by her father’s approving attitude towards Jaja who performs better than her in school.

To further illustrate the gendered foundation of the “new gifted student program,” granting that Jaja is indeed gifted and Kambili is not, as a matter of logic the latter deserves remedial classes more than her brother. Other than the brief revelation about Jaja’s academic aptitude, there is no further narrative elaboration about what being a gifted student entails. At the instance where she points out that her brother was attending extra classes, there is no perceptible attitudinal tempering of the report. Indeed, the sentence in which this is conveyed is an unmodalized, generic sentence that, therefore points at possible lack of more significant academic abilities than she is already aware. By any standards, Kambili is also more than gifted. Her form mistress, Sister Clara, who is not focalized directly by Kambili, reports that the latter is “intelligent beyond her years”(Hibiscus 38) and the principal describes her as “brilliant” (Hibiscus 39) student. Even though the form mistress and the principal, Mother Lucy, are not directly focalized by Kambili, we take the content of their report as truth, there being no imputation of dishonesty to the two in the narrative utterance “My form mistress, Sister Clara, had written, “Kambili is intelligent beyond her years, quiet and responsible.” The principal, Mother Lucy, wrote, “A brilliant, obedient student and a daughter to be proud of.” By their being categorical about Kambili’s abilities, their reports corroborate, in no uncertain terms her intellectual precocity. There is also no note of sarcasm detectable in the two evaluative summations. “Brilliant,” “obedient,” and “a daughter to be proud of,” as salient components deduced by Mother Lucy about Kambili, all accord with each other just as those realized by Sister Clara, “intelligent beyond her years,” “quiet,” and “responsible”. Were it that one term in each of the two sets was discordant with the rest, their reports would have either been clear cases of sarcasm (if the principal, form mistress or both intended to injure Kambili’s or her family’s feelings about her academic achievement and personality), malice (if

both had ulterior motives of misguiding or mis-educating Kambili) or administratively indelicate (if indeed Kambili was irresponsible and Sister Clara were then to report “intelligent beyond her years,” “quiet” and “irresponsible”. Through this re-construction of Mother Lucy’s and Sister Clara’s focalization of the person of Kambili and her academic aptitude, there is unequivocal proof of their veracity in reporting about Kambili’s academic gift. Eugene’s facilitation of Jaja’s remedial classes, and neglect of Kambili as a girl, thus betrays a gender (dis)advantaging at the family level as it manifests in her father’s differential treatment and in her experience as focalizing centre.

Whereas the primary focalization in the context of father-daughter relation is Category A (positive) as a manifestation of Kambili’s wholehearted devotional obligation to her father, the patriarchal positioning of women, as it is in the narrative, lie largely beyond her grasp. In this way the reader is left to synthesize the overdetermining patriarchal values from her spatio-temporal location where her focalizing role is relegated as an unreflexive transmitter of raw social data from interlocutors before her. Other than the spatio-temporality of her view, there is no psychological tinge to her perception of interactions before her, and even significantly less so, no ideological positioning is perceptible in her regard of the evidently patriarchal content. To mark this innocence, a Category A (neutral) narrative shading is adopted in line with her psychological and ideological impassivity. In this narrative mode, there is an absence of narratorial modality, no qualified opinions and judgments about conversational content she witnesses. Simpson characterizes the narrative statements in this mode as categorical statements (55). With Kambili’s focalization, however, this categorical stance is minimized to narrative reports of acts and narrative report of speech acts of those she is observing, interpolated into extended verbatim conversations, indicating she is only capable of reading the body language of the actors before her rather than the entire discourse enacted.

The first notable of this instance is during the conversation between her mother and Auntie Ifeoma, during the latter’s first visit to the Achikes in their rural home during Christmas where, aptly, the question of propagation of family lineage is broached by her mother: “Mama fiddled with her fingers and said nothing for a while. Then she asked, “When will you take the children to their father’s home town?”” (*Hibiscus* 74). Evidently, she has the ability to read into her mother’s body language and has a general sense that something discomfiting is the subject of their discussion. However, it is manifestly remote to her what the subject is, given that her only mediation is in the form of a narrative report of

act (“Mama fiddled with her fingers...”) and report of speech acts (“...and said nothing for a while,” “Then she asked”). Ifeoma’s response to Beatrice, an extended verbal remonstrance about her late husband’s extended family, *umunna*, which perceives she inherited a sum of money which, implicitly, she is supposed to surrender to the *umunna*. A woman from the extended family goes as far as to suggest to her that she was responsible for the husband’s death. To Kambili, the striking act from Ifeoma is the manner she concludes her tirade against Ifediora’s extended family: “Aunty Ifeoma made a loud hissing sound” (*Hibiscus* 74). In response to the latter’s situation, Kambili’s mother “clucked in sympathy” and added: “... it is good that children go, especially the boys. They need to know their father’s homestead and the members of their father’s *umunna*” (*Hibiscus* 74). In the closest we see her aligning her observations with the predicament of the two women, she notes that her aunt has liberally worn a “shiny bronze” lipstick, a bold statement, whereas her mother had “bare lips” which “were pale compared to Ifeoma’s” (*Hibiscus* 74), a marker of her womanly diffidence. From the conversation it emerges that Eugene’s *umunna*, at one time, had pressed him to complement his social stature, as a wealthy man, by marrying a second wife so as to sire more children. Beatrice seems most concerned about her positional subjectivity as a woman, imbibing the *womanly* responsibility and duty to not only bear children, but to do so under the control and supervision of man. Not to have a husband, an imagination Beatrice momentarily entertains, is an astonishing condition. Her sense of astonishment at such a possibility divulges the abjection of a woman unclaimed in the patriarchal order within the narrative universe. Julia Kristeva, credited with conception of the idea of abjection, characterizes it as that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (*Powers of Horror* 4). To Kristeva, abjection:

... is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject. (*Powers of Horror* 5)

The system or order that Kristeva points at in the context of this analysis is the patriarchal order in which Beatrice as a woman is located. From her subject position the non-married woman is aberrant. Scarred by Eugene’s excesses, frustrated by “fruitless attempt” (to use Kristeva’s phrase) as a determined subject to cement her womanly position through bearing more children, and weary of keeping the composure of a “clean and proper subject” (Covino 21), Beatrice is awakened to patriarchal abjection of woman. Her sense of dismay, contemplation of an unmarried woman as an

abject, is mediated to us by Kambili's narrative report of shock act, a conveyance which itself suggests Kambili's perception of absurdity in her mother: "Mama's eyes had grown round, taking up more space on her face". Instinctively, Kambili caricatures her mother. It is instructive that her focalizations of her mother and of Ifeoma stand in contrast to each other. As already noted, Kambili sees her mother's unadorned lips as "pale" where her aunt's is "shiny" and her mother "clucks" in resigned sympathy (a demoting act evoking a broody hen) while Ifeoma makes "loud hissing sound" in anger (a heightened, justifiable expression of resentment at absurdities levelled against her by her late husband's extended family). This impulse for caricature can be attributed to her nascent observational astuteness both as the conversation between her mother and Aunt Ifeoma unfolds and also, generally, as the narrative unfolds. Thus for Beatrice to astoundedly utter "A woman with children and no husband, what is that?" adding "How can a woman live like that?" is to suggest the view that the natural course for a woman to be possessed by a man is the determining view. Man, as can be extrapolated from her statements, does not only make possible and complete womanhood, but derives redemption from being claimed by man, as she sums up: "A husband crowns a woman's life, Ifeoma. It is what they want." (*Hibiscus* 75). In this society, therefore, it is deviant for a woman to not be attached to or be (re)claimed by man.

This conversation between the two women is most significant in *Hibiscus* for foregrounding the woman's predicament in the social universe represented. Deductively, Beatrice sees it as natural that a male child's awareness of patrilineal belonging should be nurtured, and enabling such awareness in a female child is not needed. It can be extrapolated from this that this nurturing serves to mentally prepare the male child for position of power in the patriarchal discourse whereas the girl child is expected to sexually mature and be expended in furthering the patriarchal hold, as for instance when Eugene is required to add more wives and children into his fold as a patriarchal *de rigueur* (*Hibiscus* 75). This is also corroborated from *umunna* women's quotidian, teasing talks directed at Jaja and Kambili when they are at their upcountry home: "The girl is ripe *agbogho!* Very soon a strong young man will bring us palm wine!" or "If we did not have the same blood in our veins, I would sell you my daughter," another said to Jaja" (*Hibiscus* 91–92). This recalls Davies and Harre's view that in assuming a positioned subjectivity, the subject in question apprehends the world in terms discursively defined for such a position (para.8).

In relation to women and girls, the unnamed women speak the language of merchandising and consumption, as patriarchal appropriation by males in a male-monopoly marketplace. The flipside of this language is that of power assumption in relation to men who, for being “strong”, arrives with symbol (palm wine) of the patriarchal office of man, to then assume total power over woman. There is, therefore, a standard set for both genders: girls grow “ripe” or sexually mature for men, who on their part are expected to grow to be “strong” in anticipation of their hegemonic positioning in the patriarchal discourse. Though Kambili does not comprehend the gender import of the objectifying gaze and teases from the women, nonetheless there is recognizable critical eye in her description of their physical appearances, in the nature of imagery she uses to evoke these appearances, in representing their voices as well as in her narrative report of their actions. The women’s glee on seeing Jaja and Kambili is twice referred to as hooting, a description meant to give it a non-human timbre (*Hibiscus* 91). Her processing of their physical attributes enables her to make a deduction that they were all similar albeit in a negative way:

They all looked alike in ill-fitting blouses, threadbare wrappers and scarves tied around their heads. They all had the same wide smile, the same chalk-coloured teeth, the same sun-dried skin the colour and texture of groundnut husks.

“*Nekene*, see the boy that will inherit his father’s riches!” one woman said, hooting even more loudly, her mouth shaped like a narrow tunnel.

....

“The girl is a ripe *agbogho*! Very soon a strong young man will us palm wine! another said. Her dirty wrapper was not knotted properly, and one end trailed in the dirt as she walked, carrying a tray mounded with bits of fried beef, (*Hibiscus* 91-92).

At face value, the picture of the women is essentially of indigence and resilience. This is as much as we can attribute to Kambili. At narrative discourse level this translates to the women’s resignation to contentment with their fate of marginality in a universe where they have no agency. Evidently, they are erased from the world they refer to. Men generate wealth, subsequent from which act the boy assumes the father’s wealth, and on the other a young man assumes control of the mute woman.

As Stobie has also aptly fleshed out, the traditionalist Papa Nnukwu voices a sexist basis of Igbo cultural universe where the feminine “does not count” (*Hibiscus* 83; Stobie 423-24). In attributing his son’s (Eugene’s) abjecting him as a heathen, Papa Nnukwu places blame on the missionaries under whom Eugene got his education. But then Ifeoma points out to him a contradiction in his blaming

the missionaries since she is a product of the same missionary education. In a telling instinctive resolution of this contradiction, he suggests that a woman, whether she were to shun her duty to her parents or not, is dispensable since a woman does not count, assuming his worldview as typical of the Igbo. As characteristic of category A (neutral) narrative, this exchange between Papa Nnukwu, Ifeoma, Obiora and Amaka inside the car on their drive to observe *mmuo* procession, the entirety of it is objectively presented, interposed with minimal reporting clause constructions and minimal report of narrative events. In some instances reporting clauses are dispensed with completely (See *Hibiscus* 82–87). Reporting clause constructions predominantly used are X + reporting verb (where X stands for character interlocutor), such as “Aunty Ifeoma said.” Since this is an environment markedly different from that of her home imbued with paternal gaze, this unmodalized narrative reporting both mirror her withdrawal in the company of the religious abject, Papa Nnukwu, her brassy cousins, and also the impenetrability of the subjects of conversation at hand, as well as the environment around her, especially the cultural imaginary of *mmuo* procession. The decentering of the focalizing consciousness evoke Kambili’s withdrawal to the safe positional location of an objective observer keen on learning as much as possible, from what she sees, even cultivating an embracing attitude towards Igbo culture (of the gathering during *mmuo* she appears impressed when she says: “It was like a vibrant painting that had come alive”). But there is a significant brief transition into category A (negative) narrative mode in the course of this mode, which is a cartesean unsettling from the safe position:

My cousins laughed, and Amaka glanced at Jaja and me, perhaps wondering why we did not laugh, too. I wanted to smile, but we were driving past our house just then, and the sight of the looming black gates and whites walls stiffened my lips. (*Hibiscus* 82-83)<sup>26</sup>

Though the coincidence of “black gates and whites walls,” a metonymic representation of the confining paternal gaze, occasions an instinctive momentary self-check, this category A (negative) mode also foregrounds and affirms the impenetrability of even banal jokes that upbringing has not nurtured in Kambili and Jaja. Presupposing they were to laugh, it is inferable, this would have been a mechanical act as she “wanted” rather than felt it, a volitional act rather than a reflex as smiling would

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<sup>26</sup> In these two narrative sentences, even though “laugh” and “smile” refer to similar acts, i take their usage as reflecting a temporal relation rather than a synonymic use of the latter. The implication is such that smiling is an effect of failure to laugh, as a token act necessitated by Kambili’s guilt at inability to laugh.



be. This brief lapse into category A (negative), in effect, therefore, reinforce the argument that the preceding category A (neutral) construct her socially untutored perspective.

At *mmuo* procession, related from Kambili's spatial perspective, the focal angle transforms to category B narratorial (positive) mode, in which the First Person recedes to the background, except when she has to identify herself and the importance she accords to being at the location of *mmuo*: "I had never been to see *mmuo*, to sit in a stationary car alongside thousands of people who had all come to watch" (*Hibiscus* 85). Transformation into this mode in this sentence both reflect a sudden obsession, on her part, with the alien-like *mmuo* to the extent that she forgets to dwell on identifying the positionality of her observing self. She becomes immediately engrossed, in that golden opportunity away from the forbidding father, in gazing at the disallowed *mmuo*.

This minimality of occurrence of reporting clauses also reflect a tentative self-relegation to the safe positional location where she is under no coercion to draw moral lines, by virtue of the loosening grip of paternal spectre away from home. From this focal angle, where there is little error or inaccuracy of reporting ideological significances of what is before her, owing to her unworldly perspective, we are enabled to more objectively synthesize the sexist establishment of the Igbo culture. Thus, we encounter Papa Nnukwu offering a sexist sketch of *mmuo* cultural imaginary by generalising it. In this world, women *mmuo* are inconsequential, sexualized spectacles presided over by juveniles, unlike the more potent ones presided over by the elderly men. Women spirits, Papa Nnukwu reveals, are "harmless," an elaboration of which Kambili objectively describes:

The *mmuo* he pointed to was small, its carved wooden face had angular, pretty features and rouged lips. It stopped often to dance, wiggling this way and that, so that the string of beads around its waist swayed and rippled. The crowds nearby cheered, and some people threw money towards it. Little boys – the followers of the *mmuo* who were playing music with metal ogenes and wooden ichakas – picked up the crumpled naira notes. (*Hibiscus* 85–86)

Being a symbolic incarnation of the underworld, the smallness parallels the diminished stature of the woman in the corporeal Igbo world, whereas its physical appearance is meant to appeal to the eye rather than engender a mystique like the more threatening *mmuo* conducted by the elderly men. While the more potent *mmuo* make no frivolous display, the woman spirits, "with string of beads around its waist" engage in sexualized dancing in which adorning string of beads around the waist mark and



highlight the bodily locus of the spectators' attention. The *mmuo* therefore underscores the marginal status of the woman and powerful, disciplining potency of man.

### **The good home training: paternal gaze and 'normal' familial space**

Apart from the force of gender subjectivity, there is also the more potent one of parental authority, especially of paternal figure's demand for and enforcement of subservience. An interrogation of parenting, especially from the paternal angle, in the novel is important not least because the focus author has discoursed on the subject at length in *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* which came out in 2017. Parental responsibility is also extensively given treatment in the narratives which predate the publication of this essay. The particular nature of relationships in the domestic sphere has been approached as allegorical articulations of the more far-reaching subjection processes involving the Nigerian state and its subjects (Hron 34; Okuyade, 'Changing Borders' 251, 254-55; Sandwith 102; Stobie 423). For Hron, just as the reader appreciates the repressive domestic subjections, so does the same reader, through this domestic oppression, take note of repressive excesses of the state by cannibalistically entrenching itself in Nigeria's body politic (34). Okuyade aptly observes that to the extent that Kambili, Jaja and their mother are deprived of voice at home, so do "Nigerian people continue to be subjected to silent spaces" ('Changing Borders' 251). Whereas this readings validly draws parallels between subjection within domestic sphere and those in the wider national space, and the necessity of exploration of this "relation of reflection, refraction, and reciprocity" (Sandwith 102) between subjugations in the two spheres, does not subordinate *Hibiscus*'s primary story of patriarchal and paternal oppression and Kambili's emerging consciousness in the middle of this domestic oppression, as Sandwith points out (102). This section invests in reading the domestic relationships in order to establish the prevailing values that entrench "a virtual Panopticon for surveillance and control" (Stobie 426) that situate the paternal figure in the fictional world in position of authority.

This analysis approaches the father figure of Eugene as processed through the consciousness of Kambili that discursively outline a heavy-handed religious fanatic and a callous father. However, there have been critical perspectives that have sought to how the complete opposite of this assertion. Eyoh Etim and Ima Usen Emmanuel's deconstructive reading of *Hibiscus* is representative of these

perspectives that rescue Eugene's image as a cruel father. To undertake this Etim and Emmanuel first assert as their centre-piece that Eugene is the protagonist and hero of *Hibiscus* while disputing Kambili's role as protagonist and heroine (15). This is because as a protagonist, Eugene is significant in orienting the course of event in the novel. The hero and protagonist status they give to Eugene is based on the definition they assume of protagonist as that character in the story opposed by an antagonist because such a character "is the principal reformer, the strong supporter, advocate and champion of a cause of action" (Kamalakar 2). This way Kambili is disqualified from protagonist status and Eugene is elevated because, first, he struggles in life and "rose from dust and rust to a position of greatness in the society" (Etim and Emmanuel 17). The two also aver that Eugene is the hero in the church he serves because he is charitable and, couple with this, is that he is serious in ensuring protection for his family as reflected in the high walls he has erected around their home in Enugu (17). As for domestic battery, Etim and Emmanuel rationalize that Eugene is justified in limiting his children's exposure to others, especially his sisters influential family, because he "is aware of the negative influence" (Etim and Emmanuel 18) of these others. Eugene's disdain for his father, Papa Nnukwu, who does not want to be associated with Kambili and Jaja, is justifiable by the former's Catholic doctrine that makes it only "natural that he clashes with the indigenous traditions and institutions" because he is "concerned for his children's sensibilities" (18). Etim and Emanuel's justifications for Eugene's heroic and protagonist status, when examined with keen attention to the way he is focalised by Kambili, resolve into apologia for domestic brutality. The hero-protagonist premise dissolves when due consideration is given to the definition of protagonist which necessarily imply such a character is a champion of a cause. Though Eugene champions freedom at national sphere, he fails to do the same in the private sphere. Even so, as indicated above, the domestic sphere has been used to allegorically represent repressiveness of the Nigerian state, and in these terms therefore, Eugene is an allegory of anti-hero. Similarly, to the extent that Eugene's apparent championing of liberty nationally is annulled by his infringement of the same in private (thus disqualifying him as protagonist), so is Kambili disqualified as a protagonist or heroine because she is a passive observer, even object, of happenings and actions of others. I argue that *Hibiscus* is not a narrative that presents characters in a manner that require their being assigned protagonist or antagonist tag, but rather a narrative that requires to be read more in terms of how tyranny and its

various manifestation is focalised. This is the task the chapter sets out to not only demonstrate but to also exploit it in explicating the norms that it foregrounds.

Cynthia R. Wallace in ‘Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Hibiscus* and the Paradoxes of Postcolonial Redemption’ anecdotally sets off through recounting the paradoxes arising from the competing readings of the novel (465-66). Many critics, Wallace sums up the paradox, foreground optimism that marks the horizon of the narrative’s ending, while still more others underscore that these optimism does not match the misery and tragedy that drive the narrative to that end. This paradox, Wallace goes on, owes to the critics’ diverse localities as well as inherent “interpretive practices invited by a text like *Hibiscus* from its particular postcolonial location” (Wallace 466). Analytic approach to the novel from the location of a Western reader, Wallace suggests, is likely to yield either optimism or pessimism rather than amalgamation of these divergent readings (467). This calls attention to the significance of reception perspectives on *Hibiscus* as a result of mediation of the critic. But aside from this reception level interpretive dissonance, there also exists within narrative discourse competing ways of comprehending and living through the presented world with regard to the experiencing characters. The most influential, with reference to Kambili as the focaliser, is her father, Eugene, her aunt, Auntie Ifeoma and her grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu. But the former exerts more profound influence, first through the force of his paternal significance and, secondly, mostly through his no-nonsense demand for subservience.

There have been critical analyses of focal stance in *Hibiscus* that inform our purpose here of outlining determinant normative structures and practices in Kambili’s society. Tunca has undertaken an analysis of Kambili’s worldview, adopting Roger Fowler’s mind style that privileges a focus on evidence of linguistic structures that serve as indices of her worldview incorporated into a text. Tunca concludes that initially the simple vocabulary and “plain syntactic structures ... inconspicuously conceal Kambili prejudices” against her authoritarian father, but as the narrative advances “a far more straightforward type of language shows that the narrator’s questioning of her father’s narrow-minded principles translates into discursive freedom” (‘Freedom Song’ 15). Tunca’s aim is to demonstrate how (through a trace of Kambili’s mind style) oppression and freedom are evidenced in the narrative (‘Freedom Song’ 2). Here, however, the aim is not to trace Kambili’s evolution from oppression to freedom, but how her worldview opens a critical window through which to appreciate the extant values and

practices that shape her world. So whereas Kambili's worldview is pertinent here, it is harnessed for the different purpose of determining the foregrounded normative structures and practices. On the other hand Udukwu explores what he refers to as voice (which he suggests encompasses two aspects, namely who sees and who narrates (190-91)) in *Hibiscus*. A quick note of Genette's distinction between voice and mood show that Udukwu potentially collapses Genette's distinction between narrating agent (which in Genette's terms falls under the category of voice (*Narrative Discourse* 31-32)) and the perspective or focalisation (which in Genette's terms falls under rubric of mood (*Narrative Discourse* 161-62)) under which Genette clusters all those aspects of narrative discourse (one of which is focalisation) whose function is to regulate information relayed by narrating agent.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, Udukwu makes an instructive observation about focalisation function of Kambili that situates her in the vortex of societal values thus making her a strategic character that enables the mining of prevailing values and attitudes. Kambili's position in the narrative, he argues, is that of synthesis where diverse values are processed, with those represented by Eugene on one hand (referred to as thesis because his values largely prevail) and with those represented by Ifeoma (referred to as antithesis because they challenge Eugene's authoritative values) on the other hand (191). In this synthesis position, Kambili has to wade through these competing values and by analysis of her focalising function, therefore, it becomes possible here to reveal what these values are.

As entry point to an approach to the novel's focalization structure, a consideration of its diegetic levels would be fruitful, that is: whether the narrating voice reside within (embodied in one of the characters) or outside the story-space (disembodied, observing and recounting narrator). It is immediately clear that narration in the novel is homodiegetic. The narrating voice coincides with the person of Kambili who is affected by, and to some extent affects, events in the story. For example, she reports to us what happens and who is around her at home, school, church, at Ifeoma's residence at University of Nigeria,

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<sup>27</sup>Clearly, Udukwu misreads Genette when he claims that "[i]n accord with contemporary theories of narrative, especially influenced by the work of Gerard Genette, voice is used strictly in terms of how we can provide answers to two key questions[namely who sees and who speaks]" (190-91). This is in fact inconsistent with Genette's own painstaking attempt to draw distinction between narrating agent (voice) and narrative perspective. While pointing out the necessity for this distinction by referring to earlier theorisations on point of view, Genette argues that:

to my mind most of the theoretical works on this subject ... suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* - or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?* (*Narrative Discourse* 186 emphasis in the original)

Nsukka, what transpires at Aokpe where an apparition of Our Lady has been sighted, as well as what happens during the *mmuo* procession. On a number of occasions, she is subject to Eugene's cruel benevolence, such as scalding her feet as punishment for being near her 'heathen' grandfather while visiting Nsukka, compelling her to sip scalding tea as show of "love" (*Hibiscus* 31, 195). But this homodiegetic obviousness belies the lived reality and age of Kambili. First, she is growing up in the oppressive home environment defined by her father's over-punctilious demand for conformation to what he refers to as good "home training" (*Hibiscus* 58) and by Catholicism. The evident effect of this domestic conditioning, achieved through multiple means (mostly violence and strict scheduling of time at home), is a perspectival stricture where she apprehends only the superficiality of the world around her as a result of the paternal gaze she has entered. There is even an attempt, on the side of her father, to erase some aspects of this world as when he forbids their seeing the *mmuo* procession because it is heathen (*Hibiscus* 78). We can also attribute her superficiality of political and cultural awareness (what Sandwith refers to as "limited perspective" (97)) both to her tender age and to Eugene's scheduling of their lives on a mainstream counter-course, muting the world outside the family sphere by omission of television time in their schedules (*Hibiscus* 79). At home, their lives thrive on a limited regimen of prescribed activities, namely siesta, family time, eating, praying, studying, playing indoor games (chess and monopoly) and sleeping (*Hibiscus* 24). There is also mention of slots in this schedule when they listen to the radio and read newspapers. However, with the exception of the single episode where newspaper reading is presented (*Hibiscus* 25), there is an instance where sessions of radio listening are focalized through Eugene. Even so, the only session of newspaper reading focalized involves Eugene determining the analytic perspective on the content of the papers, with *Standard*, in which he exercises editorial control, having a favourable analysis. From the focalization of this reading session, there is no indication of Kambili's intellectual involvement in the act of reading, a pointer to the limits of her grasp of Nigerian politics carried in the papers. She offers no point of view and neither is she accorded such an opportunity by her father. Indeed, as will be shown subsequently, focalization of this event, betrays Kambili's subject of attention, which is her father rather than the newspapers.

On the other hand, the strain of Catholicism practiced at her Parish in Enugu, under the auspices of the colonial white priest, Father Benedict, and which her father strictly enforces at home, has severely curtailed her outlook, both in terms of imagination capacity and in terms of cultural and moral

consciousness. The image of her grandfather, for instance is conceived as low and irredeemable heathe even despite subsequently attempting to disabuse herself of this imagination on physically encountering Papa-Nnukwu: “I had examined him that day, too, looking away when his eyes met mine, for signs of difference, of Godlessness. I didn’t see any, but I was sure they were there somewhere. They had to be.” (*Hibiscus* 63). Courtesy of her father, the grandfather is “one of the people whose conversion we prayed for so that they did not end in the everlasting torment of hellfire” (81) Godlessness, which in this context is imbued with connotations of the subhuman, is immanent in her grandfather regardless of glaring evidence to the contrary.

Kambili’s focal depth is therefore severely stunted to an extent that we do not count on her reliability as narrator. Despite her homodiegetic location, she has limited comprehension of the situation around her. In most cases, where political events are involved, she becomes a passive by-stander, rather than a participant, through whose eyes and ears we synthesize the political ferment around her, a situation of which she remains largely uncommitted. We therefore anticipate constant shifts in the focalization pattern that reflects this diagetic position of Kambili.

First, we focus on Kambili’s homodiegetic positioning which has an implication on our apprehension of personages (herself included) in the world projected in the narrative, including the social, cultural and political spaces and values that structure this world as they filter to us through her. Right from the beginning at the story-level, we perceive her intense adoration for her father under whom she is psychologically, socially and religiously determined:

He liked to lean back and look upwards when he talked, as though he was searching for something in the air. I would focus on his lips, the movement, and sometimes I forgot myself, sometimes I wanted to stay like that forever, listening to his voice, to the important things he said. It was the same way I felt when he smiled, his face breaking open like a coconut with the brilliant white meat inside. (*Hibiscus* 25)

This enables us to imagine not only a venerable father, but a deeply respectful daughter. In an eager bid to further this relation, Kambili even unconsciously sees a rival in her brother, Jaja, especially when it appears as though the latter seem apt at producing what they perceive as the ‘correct’ responses, which resonate with the inclination of their father. When Jaja gestures at a subtle distinction between

“President” and “Head of state”, drawing his father’s smile of endorsement, Kambili is possessed by a rush of jealousy:

“The *Standard* would never write nonsense,” Papa said, putting the paper down. “Not to talk of calling the man a ‘president.’”  
 “‘President’ assumes he was elected,” Jaja said. “‘Head of state’ is the right term.”  
 Papa smiled, and I wished I had said that before Jaja had. (*Hibiscus* 25)

As Eugene peruses the newspapers, a day after the coup, Kambili is keen to observe, catalogue, select and report hierarchized information that privileges him. From the copies of the “major [news]papers” delivered to their home they have to instinctively read *Standard* first, a paper owned by Eugene, then others afterwards (*Hibiscus* 25). There is even indication that at the end *Standard* is the only paper Kambili reads, the others being left for the authoritative father to venture into as they are supposed to be fraught with “nonsense,” which, therefore, it would be impolitic, in that home environment suffused with paternal authority, to associate with. Fortifying this assertion is the fact that Kambili does not report her views about what she could possibly have read in those papers, other than the *Standard*. For having conveyed, with palpable relief, that “[o]nly the *Standard* had a critical editorial, calling on the new military government to quickly implement a return to democracy plan” (*Hibiscus* 25 emphasis added), an expectation would be that she would proceed to give her own damning reportage of the other papers available, more so as it would be in line with securing the distinction of her father’s media house, the *Standard*. But it appears that rather than read these other papers, she prefers her father’s mediation of the ‘unbefitting’ opinions and editorial pieces of those papers, a preference which, arguably, provides a strategic opportunity for her to punctuate his pontification with approval-seeking quasi-philosophical-cum-religious truism:

“... This country is going down, way down.” [Eugene said]  
 “God will deliver us,” I said, knowing Papa would like my saying that.  
 “Yes, yes,” Papa said, nodding. Then he reached out and held my hand, and I felt as though my mouth were full of melting sugar. (*Hibiscus* 26)

With regard to focalization in this episode, the narrative swiftly modulates between Category A (negative), (paragraph starting “Papa pushed the chessboard ...” (*Hibiscus* 24)), an indication of the narrator’s worry and sense of apprehension about how the news of the coup affects her father. Then this transitions into categorical cataloguing of father’s facts about coups and moralizing about politicians, presented as Free Indirect Speech. In this context, Free Indirect Speech gives the



impression that it is Kambili expressing her own authoritative grasp of trajectories of coups and coup-making:

Coups begat coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups of the early sixties, which ended up in civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk. (*Hibiscus* 24)

This introjection of her father's moralizing and authoritativeness about characteristic nature of military take-over is strengthened by the fact that there is only a single occurrence of reporting clause "he said" in the first sentence, being dispensed with in the subsequent sentences (*Hibiscus* 24). Focal angle then briefly mutates from Kambili's personal perspective into a collective 'we' (Nigerians) narrated in Category A (positive) mode, again as Free Indirect Speech of Eugene's desire for democracy as reported by Kambili:

But what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. *Renewed Democracy*. It sounded important, the way he said it, but then most of what Papa said sounded important. (*Hibiscus* 24-25).

As with the previous example of Free Indirect Speech, the reporting clause ("the way he said it") comes much later. This deployment at this point has an effect of implying her introjection of Eugene's political positions, not because such positions are necessarily intelligible to her but, on the contrary, because these are positions subscribed to by her father. It is noteworthy that though there are limited verbs of perception, as is evident in the passages referred to above, at instances where they occur, our view of how father-daughter relation is perceived by the narrator dramatically changes. We see this occurrence as the focal angle shifts to Category A (positive), a dramatic turn in which the narrator foregrounds her feelings towards her father:

I would *focus* on his lips, the movement, and sometimes I *forgot* myself, sometimes I *wanted to stay like that forever, listening to his voice*, to the important things he said. It was the same way I *felt* when he smiled, his face breaking open like a coconut with the brilliant white meat inside. (*Hibiscus* 25 emphasis mine)

Arguably, then, Category A (positive) narration marks a climactic re-affirmation of the venerated father-devoted daughter relation. Starting with her revelation of jealous reaction to Jaja's astute separation between 'President' and 'Head of state,' we detect a desire to place herself in the nurturing gaze of her father: "Papa smiled, and I *wished* I had said that before Jaja had." Smarting from this



upstaging by Jaja, she immediately contrives her own opportunity which, we deduce, produces the spellbinding effect:

“God will deliver us,” I said, knowing Papa would like my saying that.  
 “Yes, yes,” Papa said, nodding. Then he reached out and held my hand, and I felt as though  
 my mouth were full of melting sugar. (*Hibiscus* 26)

In this context, this climactic function of Category A (positive) focalization is also reinforced by the fact that it is the means by which the chapter narrative is concluded, re-affirming the nurturing presence of the benevolent father.

There is also the dimension, beside the politics of the body, and in the context of *bildung*, the experience and practice of familial relations from within and from outside the familial space. As many critics have argued, Kambili’s young mind provides a template upon which Igbo paternalism is discursively enacted.

First, we are ushered into a social world ordered, first and foremost, through the criteria of age. When Kambili’s mother enters the latter’s room with laundry collected outside from the drying line, we are alerted to social rule that “it was not proper to let an older person do your chores” but that her mother did it anyway. Clearly, this general rule is flouted by the mother, to the discomfiture of the daughter, because the former is delighted to use the occasion to reveal to Kambili about her pregnancy. This act of revelation by mother to daughter, we can also infer from the narrative, is itself “improper” socially and from Catholic orthodoxy, in as far as there is an indication that experience of maternity (we shall examine the importance of this in emasculation of women section), and all that which inform its nature in the Igbo cultural world presented, especially the necessity of sexual intimacy, is altogether unimaginable to the young Kambili (21). Implicit from the offline narration, she unsexed the image of her father she has come to mentally construct: “I could not even think of her and Papa together, on bed they shared, custom-made and wider than the conventional king-size. When I thought of affection between them, *I thought of them exchanging the sign of peace at Mass, the way Papa would hold her tenderly in his arms after they had clasped hands*” (*Hibiscus* 21 emphasis added). On one hand, that this imagination is consistent with that of somebody as young as Kambili. However, coming at the chronological beginning of the narrative, has a significant influence on how we expect to be presented with the image of the father in the rest of the narrative. If anything, Beatrice’s revelation about her

pregnancy has a counter-effect of demoting Kambili's image of the father. We infer, from the way the generic sentence, succeeding her short response to her mother's revelation, is modalised: "Papa deserved praise for not choosing to have more sons with another woman, *of course*, for not choosing to take a second wife. But then, Papa was different" (*Hibiscus* 21 emphasis added). The sentence expresses an obligation to pay homage to her father, but it leaves out the subject of the homage. However, since the narrative comment immediately ensues from the conversation with her mother and the fact that the reasons for homage are restated in the sentence, the subject of the homage, as a matter of logic, is her own mother. Even though it has an effect of relegating the image, to the degree that it is her mother propositioning her father's praiseworthiness, then to Kambili this is matter of fact that need not be vouched for and as long as it was generally in tune with her more ennobled image of him. To her, whereas her father was estimable for not marrying a second wife and for not siring children with other women, the stature of her father rests on higher hallowing premises: "But then, Papa was different. I wished that Mama would not compare him with Mr. Ezendu, *with anybody; it lowered him, soiled him* (*Hibiscus* 20 emphasis added). It is in this interaction that we have a view of what to expect of her imaginations about her father throughout the narrative. When Ifeoma, casually calls Eugene by his name in presence of Kambili, we detect a sense of sacrilege in the mental operations of the latter, as a result of the casual address:

Every time Auntie Ifeoma spoke to Papa, my heart stopped, then started again in a hurry. It was the flippant tone; she did not seem to recognize that it was Papa, that he was different, special. I wanted to reach out and press her lips shut and get some of that shiny bronze lipstick on my fingers. (*Hibiscus* 77)

This heightened discomfort at the possibility of her father being a common person enables us to configure a consecrated father.

But the pervasiveness of paternal influence is not limited to the imagination of distinction. Paternal authority is also etched onto Kambili's temporal awareness. Against the backdrop of her programmed time and space, that of the foetus is supposed to be already configured in a similar manner. Behind and beyond, over and above her life time and living space is bestrode by her father:

I pushed my text book aside, I looked up, and stared at my daily schedule, pasted on the wall above me. *Kambili* was written in bold letters on top of the white sheet of paper, just as *Jaja* was written on the schedule above Jaja's desk in his room. I wonder when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born

or wait until he was a toddler. Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day. (23-24)

Arguably, the fact that the schedule is *above* her is significant in many ways as far as her view of her father in relation to herself is concerned. It is obvious that the schedule dictates what she is supposed to do with her life time at home. Also obvious is that the schedule is not the author of itself but a stipulation of her father. In the narration, Kambili's way of apprehending this schedule reinforces this argument. The schedule is not perceived as a sequence of activities, *per se*, but, instead, as an activity of her father, ceded to the background by the passive verbs. We note this paternal presence and activity in the deployment of the active verbs '*pasted*,' and '*written*' embedding the father as the indirect subject, as opposed to the possible alternative 'I looked up and stared at my daily schedule, on the wall above me, my name *Kambili* in bold letters ....' Her father, therefore, manifests in the schedule pasted *above* her in her room and for this reason, the schedule reflects her father, who pores down on her, from a position of power as benevolent custodian, she returns the look and sees herself, reflected in her name written by her father on top of the schedule. Through this gaze, a Foucauldian concept regularity of rhythm, and the necessity of it, within the familial space is normalized, even idealized, in her eyes as suggested by the epistemic modality in the sentence "I wonder when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler'. By means of the adverbial clause 'when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby,' the certainty of Eugene's paternalism, seen as nurturing and indispensable to Kambili through the paternal gaze, is reinforced. This is also made evident in the images of women church-goers she sees at the university chaplaincy, Nsukka, where she attends a Mass:

The women did not tie their scarves properly around their heads, to cover as much hair as possible. I watched them as they came up for offertory. Some just draped see-through black veils over their hair; others wore trousers, even jeans. Papa would be scandalized. A woman's hair must be covered in the house of God, and a woman must not wear a man's clothes, especially in the house of God, he would say. (*Hibiscus* 240)

Though Nsukka, where these images are seen, represents a hinge for Kambili in loosening herself from paternal hold, this observation indicates her way of seeing at this particular juncture is still determined by her father's. The moral merits of women putting on trousers and leaving parts of their hair uncovered, in this case, lie not in their being innately scandalizing, or in terms of Kambili's own subjective view but in their possibly being brought to a view framed by Eugene's ubiquitous presence in absence. The use of Free Direct Speech again, as already seen above, with posterior placement of

the reporting clause “he would say” serves as a signalling her moral anchorage, rather than an attribution of a perspective to her father, for her perspective is continuous with the father’s.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the nature of relationships in the private space allegorically articulate the more far-reaching subjection processes involving the Nigerian state and its subjects. *Hibiscus* presents these political intrigues only as “shadowy, unspecified sense of social upheaval in which political events are heard secondhand” (Sandwith 97). ‘The American Embassy’ presents a detail of this upheaval in the form of ravaged mental terrain of the unnamed protagonist and it is this text that best exemplifies one Adichie’s major thematic fragments.

### **Nigeria’s postcolonial *commandement* in *Hibiscus* and ‘The American Embassy’**

In *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembé offers the construct of *commandement* with a reference to the background of European colonialization of the African world. By the term he proffers an understanding of sovereign colony as one that is driven by rationality of violence and attenuation of right and/or in which the idea of right was annulled (25). *Commandement*, he contends, became systemically ingrained as activity of governing through incessancy, repetition, reiterative deployment, “even in most banal and ordinary situations” consequently being socially constituted as “the central *imaginary* that the state shared with society, and thus had an authenticating and reiterating function”(25 emphasis in the original). Postcolonial state, Mbembé goes on, subsequently inherited this colony’s logic of *commandement* characterized by four properties. First, it is defined by a “departure from the principle of a single law for all,” though, secondly, with a preservation of a raft rights for agents of the colony’s sovereign (29, 30). Thirdly, Mbembé avers that *commandement* dissolves the division between the sovereignty’s administrative role and humanizing function, that is “*between ruling and civilizing*”(31 emphasis in the original). Two products of this, in colonized societies where some forms of autochthonous “hierarchies and patronage” persisted, are that:

On the one hand, it paved the way ... to an *unprecedented privatization of public prerogatives*. On the other, it not only allowed a degree of socialization of state power ... but also the *correlative socialization of arbitrariness*—the two movements (privatization of public prerogatives and socialization of arbitrariness) becoming, in this process, the cement of postcolonial African authoritarian regimes. (32 emphasis in the original)

In other words, autochthonous chain of command and patronage system become suffused with *commandement* to the extent it becomes a naturalized mode or rationality for production and propagation of social order. Big man syndrome (presenting in the forms of recognition marked by bestowing of such titles as Chief and *Oga*) in *Hibiscus* and *HYS* exemplify this postcolonial syncretism between aboriginal and colonial modes of hierarchies and patronage. This has also been termed neopatrimonialism, in which modern state system based on constitutionalism interpenetrate with traditional personal relationship-based modes of domination (patrimonialism), à la Max Weber, such as traditional monarchy, eldership and chiefship (Erdmann and Engel 105).

The fourth property of *commandement* is what Mbembé terms circularity, implying that as its original force is to institute total submission of the colonized, this remains its only end, to maintain obedience for the sake of obedience, rather than for any “public good” nor for any ideological reason (Mbembé 332). Mbembé’s concept becomes an apt departure point in approaching the wider socio-political tapestry conditioning the weaving of narratives, a milieu suffused with an “arrogant conviction of being right” (Stobie 423). The following then is an exploration of the short story ‘The American Embassy’ on the conceptual basis of *commandement* in terms of how it is cognized by the focalizing centre.

As a preface to examination of the short story in this light, a look at *Hibiscus* will prove complementary both to a fuller reading of the short story itself, as well as a fuller account of aspects of the novel that are only alluded to or superficially treated but are given more narrative depth in the short story. While Kambili and her brother are on a visit to Nsukka, at the height of political turmoil, four armed men “from the special security unit in Port Harcourt” (*Hibiscus* 230) burst into Ifeoma’s flat demanding to search her house because they suspect she is conniving with the rioting students. First, Kambili’s focalization of the present hallmarks of an uncontrolled and tribalised vigilante as the description “tribal marks” is used three times as a way of identifying the man (*Hibiscus* 230–31). That the men also force their way into Ifeoma’s house, when to the latter there ought to be formal search warrant, manifests the socialized arbitrariness of public prerogatives that Mbembé points to as buttressing, in this case, the Nigerian authoritarian regime. Through the limited focal stance of Kambili, we perceive “a shadowy, unspecified sense of social upheaval” (Sandwith 97) at the centre of which is the imaginary of *commandement* as well as neopatrimonialism. The first time Jaja and Kambili are being driven to

Nsukka, a police checkpoint, presumably meant as public security sanction, their driver, Kevin, had to have his way by giving an inducement of a “ten-naira note” to the policemen manning the checkpoint, at which the latter “gave a mock salute, smiled, and waved us through” (*Hibiscus* 111). Here a public prerogative to use power to maintain law and order as function of national police service is diverted into a means of private gain. This argument also applies to the judges and prison wardens who have to make monetary gain from families of convicts, as Jaja, who want to have convicted relatives included in a list of those pardoned by the interim civilian government (*Hibiscus* 207). Similarly, the military ruler, by means of *coup de tat*, arrogates himself the trusteeship of public authority ordinarily preserved, at a constitutionally set time and manner, as a donation to a legitimately instituted authority. From Ade Coker’s editorials, however, the military ruler is referred to as Big Oga, an indication that his installation as head of state through a *coup* is governed by neopatrimonial imperatives. From the fragments of hushed conversation between her father, Ade Coker and an unnamed man, it is evident that there is a personal thrust in his interest in the publication of a story about a political activist, Nwankiti Ogechi, who has been assassinated for his political activism. In an attempt to cover up the elimination, the “Big Oga” tries to “bribe” Ade Coker by granting him an interview session (*Hibiscus* 200). As with the question of gender subjectivity examined above, Kambili is capable only of a sense of “upheaval” (Sandwith 97), but does not have an independent grasp of the nature of this upheaval, though it becomes more solid to her, and therefore to us, as she pieces together the details from her reading of the *Standard*. This incident is thus largely presented objectively in the form of conversation between the characters on whom she and Jaja are eavesdropping.

Similarly, ‘The American Embassy’ revolves around a coup that is suspected to have been contrived by General Abacha’s junta to justify killing and jailing of his opponents as revealed by the central character’s husband (‘The American Embassy’ 135). The narrative is related from the physically and psychologically traumatized consciousness of the woman whose child is killed, in front of her, in cold blood by soldiers searching for her husband who they brand as “troublemaker” and “liar” but regarded by the general public, pro-democracy groups and Nigerians abroad as standing for truth and anti-oppression (‘The American Embassy’ 134-35, 137).

Starting *in medias res*, the narrative oscillates between the narrative present, characterised by pain and disillusionment, and four days back when the narrator’s life was “normal,” namely before the horror

of witnessing her four-year old son being shot in their home sitting room ('The American Embassy' 131). The narrative present, itself an anti-climax, is the reflector narrator's attempt to escape from the pain and disillusionment. The Third-person narrative angle is adopted, with the woman as the orienting centre. We are positioned to view the story space and Nigeria as narrative universe through her experience, hence constituting her as the consciousness from which that universe is reflected. This is thus to suggest that, in terms of Simpson's narrative typologies, this is category B reflector narrative where a disembodied narrator relays information but conditioned by an active focalising consciousness of a character in the narrative.

It is deducible that, even though this reflector narrator perceive normalcy in terms of her private life routine, this normalcy is also in other terms that aligns with Mbembé's *commandement*, an established order of violence marked in the scene by a soldier flogging an adult without a sense of constraint and by the revelation that even queuing, a banal, even voluntary activity as the persona and the rest are doing outside the American embassy, is done under "the soldiers' swinging whip as they [those in the queue] are herded back and forth before the line was finally formed" ('The American Embassy' 130). After whipping the man, the reflector narrator could see a characteristic glare of the soldier as he walks away with an evident sense of having emasculated his victim. The soldier has "a glower of a grown man who could flog another grown man if he wanted to, when he wanted to. His swagger was flamboyant as that of the men who four nights ago broke her back door open and barged in" ('The American Embassy' 131). As there is no reason offered as to why the soldier is whipping the man we are left with the impression that it is presented as part and parcel of the scene, as much as the other 'normal' happenings within the scene: hawking, begging, queuing for visa application outside the American Embassy, and even killing, all these happening undisrupted by the flogging of a "grown man". In addition, the sense that this kind of public 'disciplining' is a normalcy is affirmed by the man standing behind the reflector narrator: "See how the people are pleading with the soldier," the man behind her said. "Our people have become too used to pleading with soldiers," ('The American Embassy' 129), a proof both of a deployment of Foucauldian biopower in the production of the compliant subject of state and of circularity of the *commandement* logic itself. This is also reinforced by the fact that we do not perceive, through the reflector narrator, a generalized revulsion at the soldier's acts. Further, from the nagging conversational offers from the man standing behind the reflector narrator in the queue, even the American embassy, which we would expect as particularly repugnant



to military intervention in public spaces, is complicitly quiet: “Sometimes I wonder if American embassy people look out of their windows and enjoy watching soldiers flogging people” (“The American Embassy’ 131). Through the traumatized consciousness of the reflector narrator, therefore, the narrative foregrounds the excesses of General Abacha’s regime.

The narrative’s focalization scheme, as will be demonstrated shortly, defamiliarizes this logic of violence as the basis of the Nigerian polity. Through an alternation between two modes of focalization, this imaginary of instituting public authority is thrown into sharp relief. As already pointed out, the Nigeria’s *commandement* is presented by means of category B narrative in the reflector mode. It is the consciousness of the traumatized woman that is privileged as events recounted have a direct adverse psychological and physical effect on her, as her family is directly threatened. As the narration shifts from the recounting of momentary internal experience of trauma to the recounting of exterior correspondences to the trauma, there is a matching shift in focalization modality. There are, therefore, two focalization patterns which alternate in the narrative discourse, namely negative and neutral modalities, both within category A narrative mode. The pain and trauma is focalized in the negative mode whereas the exterior provenance of this pain and trauma is focalized through a neutral mode.

Narration opens in the neutral mode as we are placed in the story space outside the American Embassy, where the unnamed woman is waiting in the queue for a turn to be interviewed for asylum consideration. From her spatial angle a range of activities (hawking, and begging) are observed and generally given an impersonal demeanour. It emerges, when a man standing behind her on the line rouses her, that the woman she has been in a trance. The impersonal recounting of the story space partly arises from this trance state in which her emotional being is muted. Subsequently, it turns out that the trance was a deliberate attempt to “keep her mind blank,” a therapeutic recommendation from the doctor (“The American Embassy’ 128). At this point, the focal stance shifts to negative mode as a traumatized recall of how Ugonna died is ignited and also as it emerges that there is an emotional disjuncture between the perceived impersonal external environment and her fraught internal environment. For example, throughout the narrative the man behind her on the queue offers well-meant overtures for conversation, attempts which she constantly finds exasperating, only serving to pluck at her trauma. Also contrasting with her emotional state is what appears to her of others in the queue, with “[b]uttoned-up men and women” casually exchanging newspapers and making



hypocritical and cagey criticism of the military regime. The younger generation, unconcerned or oblivious of the pain and distress associated with the regime in place, are “bristling with savoir faire, shared tips on ways to answer questions for American student visa” (“The American Embassy’ 130). As the man behind her directs her again to see the man brutalized by the soldier, now bleeding from his face, a wave of emotional stress surges and she forces her mind to go blank again from which point the focal stance turns to neutral modality. It is at this juncture again that we perceive an impersonal thriving of business, a scenic view of street from her spatial location, and resilient, blind multi-ethnic beggars. From this blanked out state of mind, a more or less objective detailing is given, in an analeptic retrograde common throughout the narrative, of the events leading up to the dramatic moment Ugonna is shot. The reconstruction of the events, ordinary and routine, is calculated to give the impression that the killing was devastating in its being unpresaged: taking Ugonna to school, buying him sausage roll and singing casually to music in the car, an indication of harmony in her life; then an ominous hurried bid to smuggle her husband out to safety as he is being sought by soldiers. In other words, the narrative lapses back to an impassive exposition of the chronological story-level beginning, four days prior to the present when she is queuing for asylum interview. Despite the attempt to divest herself of the memory of her son’s loss, her harrowed consciousness constantly drifts her towards the very loss, facilitated by the man with whom she is queuing, again throughout the narrative, functioning as her prod into awareness of the harrowing experience. Thus as the unnamed man goes on talking about the soldier whipping a man in the street, now largely a monologue given that the reflector narrator is taciturn, the image of the soldier re-ignites the racking detail of how the “men”, with the same menacing flamboyance as the soldier, forced their way into her house on the material fourth day before the narrative present.

Like episodes where her fraught consciousness prevails, focalization shifts to negative shading, to match a heightened sense of loathing for the military as culprit in the death of her only child, as well as mark her psychological torment. In this most intimate detailing of the encounter with the men, presented in Free Direct Speech as if the entirety of the encounter were replaying in her mind dissected for us, we implicitly learn that one of the men also rape her:

He sat down on the sofa, where her husband always sat to watch the nightly news on NTA, and yanked at her so that she landed awkwardly on his lap. His gun poked her waist. *Fine woman, why you marry a troublemaker?* She felt his sickening hardness, smelled fermentation in his breath.

....

She pried herself free and got up from the sofa, and the man in the hooded shirt, still seated, slapped her behind.... The man in the hooded shirt was laughing, saying how soft her body was, waving his gun. ('The American Embassy' 132)

In addition to witnessing the dying of her child, therefore, she has to contend with a rape ordeal, both associated with the agents of the military regime. Through her consciousness, vividly concretizes images of General Abacha's military establishment as necessarily irrational, unintelligent, drug addicts and rapists and more still that they were common men. In their search for the reflector narrator's husband, they had opened "even the drawers. She could have told them that her husband was over six feet tall, that he could not possibly hide in a drawer" ('The American Embassy' 131). Their smelling of alcohol and pepper soup 'cuts them down to size' as common men who partake of common soup as other people like the reflector narrator, but also more as deplorable personages hooked to and impelled by effects of drugs, so much unlike the sober reflector narrator. The association which the woman develops of pepper soup with the men, vowing "she would never eat pepper soup again" speaks of her disdain for them and, by extension, the military regime ('The American Embassy' 131).

Invariably, the images of these agents as focalized in 'The American Embassy' and in *Hibiscus*, conform to Mbembé's description of fetish which, citing M. Coquet, connote "an object that aspires to be made sacred; it demands power and seeks to maintain a close, intimate relationship with those who [are supposed to] carry it" (cited in Mbembé 111). The soldiers, as agents of *commandement*, are fetishistic objects which in the consciousness of the traumatized focalizing woman are no more human than she is and less so for depending on drugging themselves to effect their *commandement* function. This deliberate degrading of that which the fetishistic power is lodged constitutes the practice of the obscene and the grotesque as means of "deconstructing ... regimes of violence and domination" by uncovering the inherent base nature of such fetish (Mbembé 105). In the words of Mbembé again "the fetish, seen for the sham it is, is made to lose its might" (108), instead becoming an appalling common man.

In summing up on *commandement* in 'The American Embassy' in relation to the schema of its focalization, we note that the narrative constantly shifts between Category B (Neutral) and Category B (Negative) shades, each serving a distinct function, but both discursively rendering a common stance that the narrator offers us to take. Generally, episodes focalized through Category B (Neutral) system

foreground the reflector narrator's traumatic experience of military regime's excess, sustained first-hand from the horrifying ordeal at the hands of the regime's agents. It also affords us an entry into the racked consciousness of the reflector narrator for a more intimate appreciation of the trauma that she lives with despite the apparent normalcy that is thriving around her as focalized neutrally through her. Advised by the doctor to nurse this trauma by keeping her mind "blank" this proves hopelessly impossible, the more to chafe at her trauma, and more to garner our empathy. Likewise, her neutral focalization of her environment, her immediate past before the death of her son, the normalized brutality of a soldier in the street, only serve to bring to sharp focus her traumatic ordeal through the equally sharp contrast the familiarity relates to her harrowed experience. In her focalization of the care-free man standing behind her on the queue, who pointedly tells her it was impossible to proof her case for asylum, and in the "young people in jeans, bristling with *savoir faire*" strategizing on how to answer interview questions for student visa and *not* asylum, confirms a normalized *commandement* that does not therefore obstruct their parochial ambitions. As if secretly sharing the trauma with the woman that none on the queue knows nor seem to imagine, except see at a background from the safety of imagining the naturalized military brutality only happens at a distance, we see in the foreground, in her body and on the body of her dead child the grossly unjust *commandement*. We become first hand witnesses of the repulsiveness of it that her trauma throws into sharp relief. While exploring the experiences of Ifemelu on race and racism that to Americans were "habitual deceptions necessary to the ongoing work of racism" Levine observes that this first-hand experience as a black victim makes her a site for defamiliarizing American's "habits of pretending about race" (Levine, "'The Strange Familiar': Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*" 594). Similarly, the traumatic experience of the reflector narrator serves as a means to deautomatizing our perception of the acts of the military regime as normal, but as pressing public threat that needs urgent attention. By means of focalization, therefore, 'The American Embassy' points us towards the grave matter of Nigeria's *commandement* that is discursively foregrounded through the focal angle of the doubly oppressed woman.

## Conclusion

Essentially, the interrogation of the focal agent's "ways of seeing" (Boersma and Schinkel 310) granted access to socio-political values, ideas and attitudes abiding in the recounted source communities of

those on migration courses. This interrogation extended the description of normative structures and social capital in those communities to include the inherent structure of power relations that constrain the focalising characters' worldview as they abide in the represented familial sphere as well as wider social structure and the entirety of Nigeria nation. *Hibiscus* demonstrates the pervasiveness of patriarchy, parental micromanaging, especially as the latter is seen to affect psychological growth and development of children who are suffocated by pedantic parenting. As seen in the earlier part of the story in *Hibiscus*, parental obsession does not only produce submissive children (which the narrative discourse emphasize is counterproductive), but constitute the home space as repressive analogue of the national space into which the same children are subsequently initiated, hence, arguably, propagating the vicious circle of repression. The novel also underscores that repression is not only about use of physical violence as a means of disciplining the familial and state subjects, but also that patriarchy discursively disciplines its subjects into their respective subject positions as men and boys or as women and girls, with the latter as the suppressed. On the other hand 'The American Embassy' extends the thematic concern of the logic of violence in Nigeria's postcolony. The short story presents a crosssectional portrait of political totalitarianism through the anatomy of the unnamed woman, doubly oppressed as a woman and as state subject to whose agents she loses her child. From the focal stance of this unnamed bereaved woman, more strategically useful a character given the woman's already marginalised social status, *commandement* is rendered starker.

*Hibiscus* thus expatiates on the social and political characteristics that inform Nigerian communal and national contexts as departure points for transmigrants in later narratives of migration, especially *Americanah*, and those of return migration as in *HYS*. Ultimately, *Hibiscus* is a narrative of growing up, becoming self-conscious, in the sense of taking stock of prevailing normative structures and developing an awareness of one's female locations within patriarchy. From the perspective of Kambili, it is less of a narrative of engagement than of taking stock of adverse patriarchal and postcolonial power configuration as it impinges on women as well as on state subjects.

## Chapter Four: (Re)calibrating the lenses

[T]he movement towards the originary, and the ordinary, world should be the culmination of a movement towards the alien and extraordinary worlds. (Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* xi-xii)

The time of liberation is, as Fanon powerfully evokes, a time of cultural uncertainty, and, most crucially, of signifiatory or representational undecidability (Bhabha 35)

### Introduction

The chapter presents the process, typified in *Americanah* and the short story ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’, where the relocating character first experiences the disorienting conjuncture. Within this conjunctural moment, the chapter teases out the footholds (conceptualised here as personal bottomline tenets) upon which the migrant characters leverage as they devise their adaptation mechanisms. It then proceeds to argue that the leveraging on their tenets as personal traits, establishes further footholds on which interrogative, negotiatory or calculative agency emerges. Throughout the argument, the chapter centralizes the value of liminality that weaves through the experience of conjuncture and the subsequent agentic capacity that emerges.

In considering the generation of social remittance content in the chapter, overall argument is undergirded by a number of assertions. First, migrant characters enter an adaptational trajectory implicating, even as it complicates, the dialectic relations between characters’ own pre-migration background and their personal traits as adaption resources. Secondly, their adaptation implicates personal responses to and effects from the socio-cultural circumstances in the specific places to which they relocate in the United States. An important consideration is also that the transnational locations that permit processes of socially innovating as a result of differential and simultaneous access to resources in and between two localities, namely Nigeria and United States, are significant in marking out processes involved in generation of forms and contents of social remittance. In the chapter the productive relation of these factors are approached as dialectic simultaneity structuring the fraught consciousness of the focalising centre, à la Nibert Bugeja. This has also been deliberated on in literary criticism as transformative trauma. Intersectionality of these factors is disentangled not with purport of outlining disparateness of these constituent and socio-psychologically constitutive elements and

processes, but as analytic manoeuvre in fleshing out how they prevail on the consciousness of the focalising agent. The question of consciousness is pertinent here since (as detailed in chapter one), by its nature, focalization points to consciousness from which the story filters to the reader and the medium through which the same reader apprehends elements of the story.

Echoing Bourdieu's assertion in the epigraph above, this chapter thus sets out, first, to trace focal characters' socio-cultural movement, a process in which they come to apprehend social and cultural processes that affect them and which they effect in those places to which they (re)locate as non-American black people. Secondly, the chapter subsequently delves into the socio-psychological and cognitive mechanisms by which these focalizing centres engage in a reconstructive process of adjusting to the transnational socio-cultural worlds they inhabit and how this has an implication on the constitution of their own socio-cultural resources. In other terms the chapter seeks to delineate the focalizing characters' social and cultural meaning-making on arrival at various localities in the United States, in the light of their own Nigerian backgrounds, and as they unsettle in these localities. The importance of this socio-cultural meaning-making process from the vantage point of the migrant has been noted by Marlow(184) and Shahrar and Lavie-Ajayi (76) who point out a tendency in migrant adaptation research to over-emphasize psychopathological trauma as a corollary of migrants displacement. Appropriation of trauma in literary criticism re-orient this conception so that it becomes a metaphoric "event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation .... [and] makes internal changes to the mind and irreversibly changes identity"(Cathy Caruth cited in Mambrol, para.12). It is this altered mental frame realized through the event of migrant dislocation that is of interest here. The trauma novel, especially as that of dislocation in focus here, engenders a fissure in hitherto perceived socio-cultural stability, that will hence necessitate the traumatized protagonist's "inquiry into previous "truths" of the self or the formulation of identity produces a change in consciousness ... that takes the protagonist on a transformative journey" (Balaev 164). But as Mambrol suggests, the protagonist's inquiry into previous truths does not seek to retrieve such truths as determinate knowledge, but as "approximate recall" insofar as the traumatic experience enters the psyche otherwise than normal experience (para.14). In the context of the two texts to be analysed in the chapter, it is notable that the protagonists' movements to America are informed by different expectations than that which shock them on their arrival, thus engendering this trauma of displacement. Adichie's recurrent deployment of disjunctive movements in narrative focalisation,

especially in *Americanah*, as Caruth suggests, is invested with a rhetorical function that insistently “addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4-5) but which we are required to construe from the recurrent narrative figure, device or schema (of which it is identified in this dissertation as focalisation). Trauma associated with displacement in fictional narrative thus becomes a rhetoric tool by which the narrative positions us to grasp the subtle significances in the narrative discourse. This is what Bugeja also signals to with his memorial-historical dialectic which constitutes liminality at the level of consciousness as a way of coming to terms with a founding historical event. For the purposes of this dissertation, the founding event is indicated in the life-changing migration experience. Foregrounding the traumatic element resulting from migrant dislocation, as traced in the structured ways of seeing in the narrative, will be associated with the focalising migrant characters’ generation of forms and content central in the transformative journey, and which will be construed here as forms and content for social remittance. This co-optation of critical trauma serves to reinforce the postcolonial framework adopted from Bhabha and Bugeja. Hamish Dalley points out that “the language of much trauma theory relies on an imagery of invasion that brings it close to postcolonial studies’ concern with empire” (372) and its invasive presence in the colonial and postcolonial world. Similarly, arrival and settlement in new contexts, as happens with protagonist in *Americanah* and ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’ who migrate and settle in America, implies immersion in alien identification system whose ultimate effect is invasive disruption of the immigrant’s pre-migration socio-cultural memory.

The next section considers the critical moments of relocation as experienced by focalizing centres, newly arrived in the United States, compounded by the personal characteristics of these focalizers, by the communal world view in their Nigerian origins, together with its “placeness” and by the social conditions in the locales of settlement in the United States. In other words, the section explores the crisis occasioned both by the process of moving from Nigeria to the United States and of establishing themselves in specific destination points in the latter country. Here the process of movement, seen as central in producing psychological, emotional and social crisis in the focalizer, is concurrently spatial (physical relocation from Nigeria to America), temporal (a lapsing of time since departure and after arrival) as well asocial (for example engaging in “ritual that [signal] start of a new life overseas: division of personal property among friends” (*Americanah* 100)). As a physical process, it involves marked activities (such as application for visa and attendant uncertainties) of departing from Nigeria as a place



defined by psychological, social and emotional meanings, to the United States defined by pre-migration allure (for example availing of idyllic home, and abundance of amenities) as motivational drive. In addition, this physical aspect of the process results in fatigue, from trans-continental flight, from which the characters invariably recover upon physically arriving in the United States, but which is itself significant in orienting the characters' processes of generating their first impressions of their destinations. The temporal dimension is reflected in the focalising centre's affordance of junctures of retrospection and proleptic peeks vis-à-vis their predicament at hand. The social facet of this process manifests in the formalized functions organized in the impending departure in which the focalizer is prepared by kin to ascend to an elevated social status as a result of emigration to America, perceived as a place of easy and boundless opportunity. For example, in 'The Thing Around Your Neck' it is enough to merely be emigrating to the US for those staying behind to imagine the possession of a "big car," and a "big house" as default property the mover is expected to acquire as a matter of ease: "...they told you: In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house" ('TAN' 15). As a natural concomitant of this relocation is the expected transformation in her social capital. Akunna is expected to send material gifts to the stayers, regardless of expected means of livelihood on arrival in the US. I contend that these processes constituting relocation, namely the social expectations implicated, together with those of localities of settlement encountered in America, and the lost time in one place and a gained time in another, contribute in complicating, the relocating characters' (un)settling on immigration (rather than occasioning crisis, *per se*). To capture the intersectional and processual nature of these developments in relation to the focalizing characters' experiencing of place, the term conjuncture is preferred here. Other than suggesting attendant problems, crises, and "critical situation", it also emphasizes that their uniqueness arise from a combination or intersection of parallel processes ('Conjuncture'; 'Conjuncture'; 'Conjuncture') which the experiencing narrator or character has to contend with. As a term, conjuncture also resonates well with the enabling narratological framework disentangling story as disparate but interconnected series of events experienced by actors within it, and discourse as the manner of presentation of the story (Chatman 19, 295; Bal 5), an aspect of which is focalization. In relation to the focus of this chapter, therefore, conjuncture presumes a centre of experience by which the conjunctural complication is registered, enunciated and adjusted to, a centre affixed here in the focalizing characters or narrators. In the following section, a conjunctural moment of the focalizing centres in 'The Thing Around Your Neck' and *Americanah*, foundational for



acquisition of fundamental adaptation resources in the narratives, is explored. In other words, the conjunctural moment of settlement is approached as the focalizing characters' juncture of apprehending their transnational and translational locations that demand mobilizing relevant resources for adjusting to those locations.

### **Conjuncture of dislocation in 'The Thing Around Your Neck'**

'The Thing Around Your Neck' presents the movement of the protagonist, Akunna, to America propelled by a way of seeing in Nigeria that understands such mobility as progress towards wealth and elevated social status. However, on arrival in America, Akunna is sexually taken advantage of by her Nigerian host nominally known to her as an uncle. This sexual predation serves a double function of bringing into sharp focus Nigeria's ways of fostering social relationships (for example through inflecting kinship terms to contacts perceived as bearing vital social capital such as Akunna's host) and as a subjection that occasions Akunna's bold decision to storm out her host's hospitality into the uncharted American world. Through sheer courage she enters a restaurant and asks for work as waiter from the caring restaurant owner. Akunna subsequently enters into romantic relationship with a white American man who haunts the restaurant and whom she regularly waits on. From all that is manifest from this relationship, Akunna submits to the man only as romance of convenience, deriving from it psychological stability as she faces the unsettling sense of rootlessness. It is this stability that affords her a sense of collectedness, registering in a college and financially remitting to her parents back in Nigeria

Narration in 'The Thing Around Your Neck' is diagetically unique given its narrative person stance which assumes the form of address, complicating the locus of focalizing centre. As Fludernik has pointed out, second person fiction problematizes Gerard Genette's and Franz K. Stanzel's narrator-story relation paradigm of narrative dichotomy, which has prompted her, among others, to reconsider the theory, especially the dimension of narration ('Second Person Fiction' 219). While revisiting the Genettian and Stanzelian models of narration, which are not explicit on the theoretical import of the second person, Fludernik, Nance, Phelan and DelConte grapple with the problematic of communication (address and reception) that such narratives carry as a result of the address function of narrative second person (Nance 210-11; Fludernik, 'Second Person Fiction' 218-19; Phelan 350-

52; DelConte 210-12). A common impetus which emerges from this revisiting centres on the triadic relation between protagonist, narrator and narratee.

'The Thing Around Your Neck' dwells on the experience of arrival in America of Akunna, the Nigerian woman after having won the rights to live and work in America through Green Card lottery. On initial arrival she is hosted by her a fellow Nigerian who she knows as an uncle, though it subsequently turns out that this does not imply a kinship relationship. Just as she is settling down to the new place, the supposed uncle sexually takes advantage of her by exploiting his host status and Akunna's trust. The latter resolves to walk out of this residential arrangement, successfully seeking work at a restaurant as a waitress. It is in this restaurant where she grudgingly accepts to date her client, a white American man who, however, exoticizes her as a black woman more than he genuinely loves her. Despite the suffocating experience occasioned by racial divide between them, aggravated by America's social stigma attaching to cross-racial romantic relationships, she maintains the relationship out of despair for romantic security and loneliness.

As a point of departure in indicating problematic nature of narrative second person as is the case with 'The Thing Around Your Neck', Fludernik defines second person narrative as one:

whose (main) protagonist is referred to by means of an address pronoun (usually you) and add that second-person texts frequently also have an explicit communicative level on which a narrator (speaker) tells the story of the "you" to (sometimes) the "you" protagonist's present-day absent or dead, wiser, self. ('Introduction' 288)

The implication of the narrator's undertaking to represent 'you's' story (the protagonist in the process of becoming) to the 'you' (the narratee) is that the latter's experiential locus is privileged, just as much as the narrator's for "this narrator has to have acquired the knowledge of the [narratee's] story by being part of [this narratee's] world" (Fludernik, 'Second Person Fiction' 222). Likewise, as Fludernik further argues:

the very fact of addressing the you on the enunciatory plane makes for an additional existential connection with the addressee on the discourse level. The most common case in this category is therefore that of the narrator and narratee sharing both a presence of interlocution on the enunciatory plane and an existential past on the story plane. ('Second Person Fiction' 222)

Convincingly, to address ‘you’ is to presume the same communicative level in the narrative, namely the narrative discourse level. As already pointed out, since the narrator is embedded in the story level as a necessary condition to acquire not just knowledge of ‘you’s’ story, but the essential experiential competence, including psychological processes and intimate experiences (as for example in TAN, to enable them to make categorical commentary about narratee’s experience of sexual intimacy) this creates a complex relationship between the narrative agent, narratee and protagonist in the story. This degree of experiential intimacy evident in TAN “rules out as potential narrators even the most intimate of others” (Nance 371).<sup>28</sup> As further evidence orienting our view of the narrative as self-reflexive address, we are compelled to conjecture the pre-migration outlook of the protagonist (who thought then) as against the present one who, now armed with extensive first-hand experience of American world, her new self and of being away from significant others in Nigeria, assumes the role of recounting to the narratee who herself is in the process of revising how to think of America, of being there and of (not) being in Nigeria. To set forth thus: “You thought everybody in America had a car and a gun...” (‘TAN’ 115), in the manner the narrative starts is to suggest:

a knowledge of what you think *now* or at least that you no longer think as you did then, offering evidence of the connection that would be implied were the narratee an older version of the protagonist.... The narrator possesses knowledge of both the protagonist and the narratee but can stand apart from both and, in effect, introduce one to the other. (Nance 372)

Nance persuasively posits that in second person narratives, as TAN, the narrator, narratee and the protagonist distinctions are collapsed into a trinity (“a triplication of self”), in which protagonist is the being who was, narratee being the one who *is* in the process of becoming and narrator being that part of the trinity which, already wiser and philosophical for it, undertakes the enunciation of narratee’s process of coming to enlightenment (372 emphasis mine). For a start second person narrative such as TAN presuppose an I-narrator that triplicates into protagonist (who is the reflector), narratee and narrator (the latter two existing at the communicative level, that is the story about the protagonist is being told by narrator to the narratee). We perceive the narrative universe through the reflector protagonist whose superior version undertakes the voicing of consciousness train as an authorial figure. This has prompted Fludernik to term this composite medium as an authorial-figural narrator

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<sup>28</sup> By intimacy, Nance refers to Akunna’s sexual intimacy with the white partner that the narrator reports. Her reasoning, therefore, is that ordinarily even with whatever degree of intimate platonic friendship, one cannot possibly to undertake to report the exact experience of sexual intimacy of another.

(‘Second Person Fiction’ 226).<sup>29</sup> I contend that in TAN, to the extent that narratee (the Akunna who is in the process of becoming) and narrator (the already wiser Akunna) share a subjectivity, the latter as the enunciating agent at the discourse level adjudges the narratee (Akunna in the process of becoming), whereas the latter acts as reflector of the story world, encompassing the Nigerian sphere where she departs, the American sphere which confronts her arrival and the emergent transnational location.<sup>30</sup> The narratee before emigration, realized only fleetingly at point of preparation for departure to America, provides a limited focal field relevant here in determining the vital processes, on the Nigerian end, contributing to conjunctural complications that the narratee is to experience while in America. The aim here is to ultimately derive the discursive implication of this hierarchizing of focalization in terms of gradations of knowledgeability (from delusion, through to that in the process of becoming to that who is now wiser and undertakes the narration).

It is apt to recall Adéèkó’s comment concerning the post-1990s Nigerian novelists’ use of emigration to achieve closure writing in the context of Nigeria’s *commandement* (12), not least because of the contradictory use of emigration in TAN to present an inauspicious narrative beginning, but also as a means here of gathering the socio-cultural and political processes by which the characters’ emigration to the United States is supposed to represent a kind of closure. Narrative closure understood as “phenomenological feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the narrative are answered”(Carroll 1) both applies to an approach to the way in which emigration is seen as well as to the way the ultimate experience of emigration is approached in TAN. In other words, what needs to be determined here is how the protagonist’s emigration to America is perceived as a resolution of an inherent struggle for economic and social betterment considering the circumstances for departure. Secondly, what needs to be unravelled is how closural resolution of the protagonist, Akunna’s conjunctural complications contributes in our understanding of this character’s enlightenment and philosophical disposition in transnational context as acquired agency.

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<sup>29</sup> Fludernik is synthesizing from Stanzel’s typology of narrative situations, namely first-person narrative situation, authorial narrative situation and figural narrative situation. In First-person narrative situation, we apprehend the world of the story through a participating character that doubles as the narrator. Authorial narrative situation is where the story world is conveyed through omniscience. Figural narrative situation is where there is a cleavage between narrative agent and governing consciousness (usually another character) that orients the narrator’s (and thus our) access to the story world; this governing consciousness is also referred to as reflector..

<sup>30</sup> Since narrative person share a name, to avoid ambiguity the trinitarian personages will, henceforth, simply be correspondingly distinguished by protagonist, narratee and narrator.

Starting with first task of establishing the conditions productive of the desire to emigrate, ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’ points at the pressing desire to establish reputable social status and social capital. The narrative gestures at the deficiency of this two in Akunna’s Nigerian context. With reference to Helon Habila’s *Waiting for Angel*, Adichie’s *Hibiscus* and Chris Abani’s *Graceland*, Adéèkó gathers that the “constantly escalating conflicts with murderous security agents”(12)operative as the main logic producing an imagination of America among the protagonists as a sphere in which perceived deficits in their homeland (security, free choice, opportunity) exist in surplus. With respect to the texts which Adéèkó considers, Mbembé’s imaginary of *commandement* cultivates in the protagonists a closural orientation that call for exiting the oppressive Nigerian milieu and entry to the supposed sanctuary of the United States. Correspondingly, the narrative in TAN sets off at a point where a narrative sub-text is being brought to a closure by means of Akunna’s impending emigration to United States. I consider this narrative sub-text as constituting a particular way of seeing the two worlds of America and Nigeria, separately and in relation to each other, as they are represented in the narrative. At the beginning of the narrative, the discursive question that anticipates the opportune moment of emigration to America as its closure and the answer to which resonates with socio-economic exigencies orienting Akunna’s and her extended family’s view of their society and of America, can be inferred as: what fundamental ends does Akunna and the community strive for and where are these perceived as easily met? The manner in which this opportunity to emigrate to America has been focalized through authorial-figural person of Akunna figure a sub-text for which this emigration is presented as a closure. This narrative sub-text revolves around a struggle for economic capital and desire to acquire respectable social status and social capital. As she is being bidden farewell, it emerges that her family shares a single unpainted room that is scantily furnished, and her close relatives are content with her sending them petty gifts signifying a socio-economic outlook in which “minor” objects are satisfactory, set off against the grander ones represented by the “big car and house” that can be acquired in America (‘TAN’ 115). Her father, who at one point is compared to “shit” by the narrator, is employed as a junior driver, assigned to drive “a rickety” car (‘TAN’ 122). The relatives’ desire for what pass as parochial gifts, the fact that the family is cramped into one room, and Akunna’s father’s abasing himself by lying “flat on the road” (‘TAN’ 122) in front of The Big Man whose car he has rammed into, sketch an image of the family’s poverty. From the latter incident, we learn that Akunna’s father estimates the monetary value of his entire family as lesser than that of a car tire: “If you sell me and my family, you cannot

buy even one tire on your car” (“TAN’ 122). The father’s monetary estimation of the family, though it may be seen a strategic essentialism (for his acceptance of his family’s impoverishment is set as an ulterior reason so as to avoid compensating for the damage he has caused), nonetheless affirms their humble means.

The narrative sub-text, loaded into the first paragraph of the text, carries within it the view of living in Nigeria, of living in America and the potential that life in the latter bears in relation to that in former:

You thought everybody in America had a car and a gun; your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so, too. Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: in a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house. But don’t buy a gun like those Americans. (“TAN’ 115)

The extended family’s collective view and aspiration, also imbibed by the authorial-figural protagonist, of having a big house and a big car in America relates, first, to having to contend with their apparent inadequacy, unattainability or their decrepitude in Nigeria. Secondly, it relates to the value attached to social status which the narrative by means of Akunna as authorial-figural agent, gestures to its being marked by the size of these object resources as wants. The concept of geographical imaginations has been used to capture these mental constructions of places and the people resident in those places, including the social and economic opportunities available there (Riano and Baghdadi cited in Thompson 79). The association of America with easy access to a big house and a big car indicates a pattern of geographical imagination in the narrative whereby wealth and elevated social status are perceived as abundantly realizable outside of Nigeria. Even the social status-marking cars on Nigerian roads are necessarily impressed with an aura of foreignness. When the protagonist’s father, driving a dilapidated Peugeot 504, crashes onto another car which was “wide, *foreign*, and dark green, with golden headlights like the eyes of a leopard” we are ushered into a view of their society’s value of socio-economic imagination of places in which Nigeria is perceived as marked by privation, whereas America is imagined as affording of the valued resources. It is also worthy to note that the size of object resource in one’s possession is supposed to augment the social stature of the owner as, for example, the “Big Man” who does not deign to emerge from his car so as to face the protagonist’s father (evidently of much lower social status) who has accidentally damaged the Big Man’s car (“TAN’ 122). Therefore, emigration to America, where these markers of elevated social status are perceived as easily acquirable, comes not only as an opportunity to furnish oneself with these basic needs but to also

transform social status, by means of these symbolic resources, within and across both worlds. This is because, as Alan Patrick Marcus observes, geographical imaginations “are imaginations of how life is now, and how it may be different elsewhere” (cited in Thompson 81).

Simultaneous to this desire to achieve basic needs and a respectable social status is the value attaching to kinship. As an event which sharply brings to focus the significance of kinship as conveyed through the authorial-figural prism of the narratee, migration is expected to accrue benefits not just to the individual but also to kin. In Akunna’s process of migration, it is only relatives, or at least those perceived as such, who figure in the view we have through her. Uncles, aunts and cousins converge in their quarters in Lagos to express their goodwill, meant to reflect well on them as relatives in anticipation of gifts to reciprocate this goodwill. An ‘uncle’ in America, on an assumed avuncular kindness, enters Akunna’s name for American visa lottery draw. As an indication of how kinship is seen and what is expected from it, we perceive through the authorial-figural medium that it is only close family members, rather than strangers as in America, who ever wish one well in her community in Nigeria:

You wanted to write about ... how eagerly [people in America] told you about their mother fighting cancer, about their sister-in-law’s preemie, the kinds of things that one should hide or should reveal only to the family members who wished them well. (“TAN” 118)

Inferentially, goodwill is only found within a kinship circle and as long as relatives were involved in social processes in which one has vested interest, as for example the transnational linkage between her family and the ‘uncle’ in America, there was necessarily mutual goodwill, benevolence and support. Against this backdrop, the narratee presumes an avuncular bond, as cultivated between her family and the ‘uncle’ in America. In exhibiting of the beneficence prompted by “kinship institutions and idioms” (Smith 321) that undergird relationship between the narratee’s family and the unnamed ‘uncle’ in America, the latter enrolls all the narratee’s family members in a visa lottery where she emerges the only winner in the family. To this extent kinship emerges as a transnational resource by which Akunna’s family can access the perceived limitless opportunities in America. First, this is realized as a resource when he enrolls them in the visa lottery because by virtue of being in America and thus having understood the workings of the socio-political system in place there, he is better placed in the processes of enrolling them. There is evidence of this in a brief lapse into figural mode in which he is



the consciousness through which how America is supposed to be functioning is conveyed. It is implicit that he had mastered the 'language' of survival in that country in the light of the way it is seen as functioning: "The trick was to understand America, to know that America was give-and-take. You gave up a lot but you gained a lot, too" ("TAN" 116). This suggests a shrewdness he has acquired in order to navigate American way of life that thrive on exchanges of equal measure. To Akunna and her family in Lagos, this assumed kinship has already paid off as it is through his efforts in America that Akunna has won American Greencard, enabling her to emigrate in the first place. Secondly, as a perceived kinsman he is a resource inasmuch as he is one of "home people" (Smith 320) in America already familiar with its localities which are crucial in Akunna's emplacement upon emigration. In this second sense, he is a bridging resource as the narratee gains her footing in America, in pursuit of the other economic capital, social status and social capital that govern her view of Nigerian background, America and the opportunity to emigrate to the latter. The authorial-figural narrative medium through which we comprehend this cultivated kinship is that avuncular relation promises custodial uncle-niece care, in a similar way that his wife and children perceive her as sister and aunt, respectively, which engender a sense of homeliness when she arrives in America:

You laughed with your uncle and you felt at home in his house; his wife called you *mwanne*, sister, and his two school-age children called you Aunty. They spoke Igbo and ate *garri* for lunch and it was like home. ("TAN" 116).

The movement to America is therefore conditioned by geographical imaginations of America as a place of quick economic and social turnaround and the view that kinship is a resource in making this turnaround in that imagined place.

But as it turns out, the geographical imagination of America as against a Nigerian home background, and the taken for granted settlement resource value of the kinship cultivated between Akunna's family and her supposed uncle in America, scuttles the image of America and the kinship relationship involved in the migration arrangements. A constant narrative motif in Adichie's narratives of migration, related to the differential imagination of home as a physical location in Nigeria and America, is of its unremarked nature in the former as against imagined grandeur in the latter. In the narratives, the physical aspect of the image, especially the image of home, is usually the first of which the arriving character is disillusioned or of whose grandeur they subjectively defer. In 'The Arrangers of Marriage', examined in chapter two, Chinaza, a young woman of humble background relocating to America to



join her new spouse, also fantasises about the life and house she anticipates to live in once she arrives in America. It is revealed that he had:

imagined a smooth driveway snaking between cucumber-colored lawns, a door leading into hallway, walls with sedate paintings. A house like those of the newlyweds in the American films the NTA showed on Saturday nights. ("The Arrangers of Marriage' 167)

She is disabused of this imagination of their American "house" as soon as she and her new husband finally arrive in the cramped, sparsely furnished apartment in which "old, musty smells hung heavy in the air" ("The Arrangers of Marriage' 167), where they later lived. In *Americanah* Ifemelu imagines living "in a house from the *Cosby Show*" (*Americanah* 99). Though the narrator does not expound on the nature of this house, the fact that *Cosby Show* featured an affluent, upper middle class African American Huxtable Household (Hopkins 954; Innis and Feagin 692, 695) suggests the elegance of the house imagined by Ifemelu. In TAN, Akunna is first confronted by reality of having to settle into a confined space in the basement where "old boxes and cartons" were kept, evidently meant more as a store than as a bedroom ("TAN' 116). Even when she breaks away from the auspices of the uncle, it is only a "tiny room with stained carpet" that is affordable ("TAN' 117).

The confined space in the basement and the uncle's home in general are incidentally the same space and environment from which she derives and loses invaluable means of emplacing at Maine. Her uncle psychologically primes her to expect racial prejudices from Americans, a preparation which has an effect of positioning her as superior to the prejudicial Americans. He points out to her that the Americans' racial prejudice was "a mixture of ignorance and arrogance" a rationalised indictment which, arising from his longer interaction with them, arguably invites her to cognitively position herself as liberal-minded and tolerant of difference as against the prejudiced Americans of Maine. This intervention evidently enables her to maintain some degree of confidence and resilience when she faces such racial prejudice for she "smiled *tightly* when they asked *those* [racially prejudiced] questions" ("TAN' 116 emphasis mine). In addition, the uncle coaches her on how to seek employment opportunities in the neighbourhood as well as enrolling her in community college ("TAN' 116). From this environment, and because of the support she gets from the uncle, she realizes a sense of homeliness in America, conditioned by the elicited feel of being in her Nigerian community locale ("You laughed with your uncle and you felt at home in his house .... They spoke Igbo and ate *garri* for

lunch and it was like home” (“TAN’ 116)). This reassuring feeling of home synthetically emerges as an adaptation resource from translocality of her experience, evoked by the situatedness of an individual within a local milieu which constrains and is constrained by how other localities have been experienced (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 373; Conradson and McKay 168; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* 182–83). Homeliness, in this context, is not to be seen as an affect realized merely in the apparent geniality of her Nigerian host. This geniality is a discursive product founded on perceived kinship and being addressed as such (as *nwanne* and aunt, by his wife and children, respectively), in eating *garri* and conversing in Igbo language, all contributing in reliving an experience of locality left behind in Lagos. In other words these routinised practices produce affect and effect of translocal realization of Lagos home locality (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 378). Akunna’s home locale in Lagos is invoked by the routine of having *garri* for lunch, verbal interaction by means of Igbo language and addressing each other in kinship idioms while at Maine. Recalling Bourdieu’s assertion about the ordinary (*Homo academicus* xi–xii), this sense of home is couple with the sense of alienness of Maine and how Americans in this location appear as well as relate to her and against which the evocation of the former serves as means of securing a sense of belonging and anchorage. The comparative naming of this translocal experience posits a home as verisimilitude, for being “like home,” but which nonetheless is a source of psycho-social stability in the new locale. This translocal sense of homeliness, therefore, acts as an initial resource in orientating herself at Maine.

But this translocal production of home collapses when she is sexually taken advantage of by the same uncle from whose family environment this production is done, exacerbating the precariousness of her position as an immigrant. In effect, there is a conjunctural collapse of the pre-emigration view of kinship, imaginations of America and what this imagination was supposed to mean for her socio-economic status in her Lagos community. In addition, her precarious subject position as a woman in Nigerian and American patriarchal structure emerge, as the uncle rationalises his sexually violating her as an act potentially important for her success and prove of astuteness, and positioning her to the view that a woman’s achievement and intelligence are only possible by surrendering sex to man as a their precondition and as this fact is ‘common knowledge’:

After you pushed him away, he sat on your bed – it was his house, after all – and smiled and said you were no longer a child at twenty-two. If you let him, he would do many things for you. Smart women did it all the time. How did you think those

women back home in Lagos with well-paying jobs made it? Even women in New York City? ("TAN' 116–17)

This encounter has an impact on her self-esteem. Earlier in the face of racial encounters while at community college in which the uncle had enrolled her, she had maintained a sense of control and pride while encountering prejudice and newness of the community at Maine evident in her tolerantly smiling at the prejudiced curiosities of the Americans ("TAN' 116). Devastated after the sexual encounter, she locks herself up in the bathroom, setting herself off on a blind journey the following morning that takes her to Connecticut, a place she ends up only because it was the bus's destination, rather than her own intended destination. Therefore, as a result of the disillusion of how kinship and America are regarded, Akunna simultaneously loses familial support, as hope for achievement of respectable socio-economic status and self-esteem as impetus and drive for processes of incorporation in America are threatened.

In addition to the above degeneration in her social situation and status, another conjunctural facet lies on the psychological plane as what Henry, Stiles and Biran identify as migration-borne mourning (109-10). Though Akunna achieves ephemeral stability by a gain in condition and energy resources when she is employed as a waitress at Juan's restaurant<sup>31</sup>, she constantly lapses into a state of grieving as a result of social disorientation and displacement. Stabilizing as waitressing and all it affords may be, Akunna still has to deal with the problem of spatio-temporal separation from her family, relatives, friends and the stabilizing entirety of Lagos home locality, as sources of emotional support, stability and social anchorage. In other words, despite the audacious bid to fend for herself, she has to subsequently contend with the loss and mourning of the physicality of home as a result of migration. As already examined above as a conjectural crisis, the lost physicality of home is complicated by loss of social anchorage and the emotional support consequent from her escape from an environment she had, until she is raped, perceived as providing a space for psychologically enacting home. At moments when sense of separation from home is overwhelming, therefore, she sits down on bed to mentally re-live this psychologically ingrained but physically lost place ("TAN' 117). The narrator cues us into her (narratee's) fraught mental story space in two ways, both captured in the narrative statement: "Sometimes you sat on the lumpy mattress of your twin bed and thought about home" ("TAN' 117).

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<sup>31</sup>The incorporation significance of this gain in resources is elaborated on in the next subsection below as a means of niching in emplacement process.

First, the narration before this point is predominantly about the drama that attends her departure from Lagos, arrival in Maine and subsequent exit from there to Connecticut. The physical relocation to Maine and subsequent exit to Connecticut, and physical interactions during preparations for relocation, in her uncle's home, then at community college at Maine and with Juan, are focalized as primary sources of positive prospects and primary threats she is facing. Once these primary external threats have been resolved (initially through residing with her Nigerian hosts and through acquiring a means of livelihood at Juan's restaurant, renting a room and improvising on her education) focal field shifts to an attention to processes within her mental plane that evoke experience of migration-borne mourning. The fact that the narrative utterance "Sometimes you sat on the lumpy mattress of your twin bed and thought about home" is a culmination of resolution of these external threats is significant as a symbolic settling down (on the lumpy mattress) to confront another emerging threat within the mental plane, which is the mourning of spatio-temporal loss of home. Secondly, therefore, the narrator cues us into this mental plane through narrative report of thought act in the statement "... and [then] thought about home". Reference to thinking at this point differs from that as used in the very first sentence of the text. Whereas the first usage orients us to authorial-figural relational view of America and Nigeria, this subsequent usage alerts us to a narrative immersion into her mental activity. Henceforth, for close to two pages, up to the point she notices the interest of the unnamed white American man who would subsequently go out with her, a stream of day to day minutiae of lived realities in Lagos are presented, touched off by ironical precariousness of her own life in Connecticut. Poignant images of her adaptable aunts striving to win customers for the fish and plantains they are known to sell, images of those of her alcoholic uncles and their resilient families who have to crowd into single rooms and of her envious friends who, sharing in geographical imaginations of America, are buoyed by her emigration as socio-economic breakthrough. Particularly haunting is economic hardship in her family of meagre earnings, necessitating her father to supplement her brothers' reading with old newspapers brought home from his place of work. In all these ways of seeing home from the purported place of limitless opportunities, there is a palpable sense of grief that home is lost to her across time and space and that though she could remedy the humble economic circumstances at this distant home through financial remittance, she is incapable of causing a significant turnaround in these circumstances with the little earnings from waitressing. This view of her fraught experience is further

augmented by the pathologic and morbid monthly ritual of sending money to her parents through post:

Still, *you chose long brown envelopes* to send half your month's earnings to you parents at the address of the parastatal where you mother was a cleaner; you *always used the dollar notes that Juan gave you because those were crisp*, unlike tips. *Every month*. You *wrapped the money carefully in white paper* but you didn't write a letter. ("TAN" 118 emphasis added)

This pathologic fastidiousness affirms the view that even in, and despite, this grief of lost social anchorage and scant economic means, there persists a determination to maintain an impression of social and economic well-being, in tandem with the geographic imagination of American life, among those left behind in Nigeria. But this also sketches an image of Akunna who is in denial of her own dire social and economic circumstances, on one hand, and in denial of her own overwhelming grief. This angst surges nightly as the eponymic thing around her neck, its magnitude discernible from the drowned out capacity to make sense of Americans and the American society: "You wrapped the money carefully in white paper but you didn't write a letter. *There was nothing to write about*" ("TAN" 118 emphasis added). Absence of a striking tales to write home about can be reconstructed from the context of the narrative to mean that the observer is yet incapacitated in terms of social awareness, as opposed to the possibility that indeed there was absolutely nothing to write home about. The veracity of this assertion is borne out by her subsequent revelation that she had "stories to tell" ("TAN" 118) an attestation to her prior observational debilitation.

The reading of TAN reveals that the genesis of conjunctural complications on arrival by Akunna in the United States is not limited to her unpreparedness for the encountered realities awaiting her on arrival there, and her Nigerian community's socio-cultural logics of kinship relations. The complications, as demonstrated, are partly lodged in geographical imaginations of America in relation to social and economic status in Nigeria.

### **Conjuncture of dislocation in *Americanah***

In order to delineate a similar conjunctural moment in *Americanah*, we seize upon the idea of geographical imagination shaping the Ifemelu's vicissitudes on arrival in United States, but will seek to expand on it so as to foreground the larger social forces in Nigerian context that catalyse the crisis of arrival and settling. These larger social forces present in the form of social class glamour, partly fed

by corruption associated with the political class. Narrative in *Americanah* drives towards this ineluctable crisis through the appeal to class layering of Nigerian society rather than by setting off on this narrative course from the premise of generalized and common yearning for respectable social status seen in TAN. The major way by which *Americanah* defines the middle class is by overplaying transnational shuttling, especially between Nigeria and the metropolitan West, England and the United States. An immoderate example presented is Mrs Akin-Cole, a supercilious jet-setting woman, in whose utterance can be deduced contempt for anything Nigerian unmediated by a metropolitan linkage:

“If you decide to disadvantage your child by sending her to one of these schools with half-baked Nigerian teachers, then you only have yourself to blame,” Mrs Akin-Cole said. She spoke with the unplaceable foreign accent, British and American and something else all at once, of wealthy Nigerians who did not want the world to forget how worldly she was, how her British Airways executive card was choking with miles. (*Americanah* 29)

Though Mrs Akin-Cole is not as strategic a character in terms of plot development in the novel, her being foregrounded serves to highlight the social environment of social class glamour through the avenue of transnational location. Auntie Uju, a force in Ifemelu’s formative years as a young woman, presents a gendered dimension to this class-imbuing significance of transnational location. Her concubinage to The General is overshadowed by the latter’s drive to practice his male virility and fortify his masculine ego in two ways. First, we learn from Auntie Uju that when she conceives, he is markedly elated: “He is happy to know that he can still score a goal at his age, old man like him!” (*Americanah* 84). Secondly, he indicates his preference to have the baby so conceived delivered in metropolitan West, England or America, a gesture which in the context of class glamour in Nigeria, is anchored in his quest for potency resonant with his stature, both as a military figure and as wealthy man. He calculates this transnational dispersal of his concubine’s reproduction events (conception in Nigeria, parturition abroad), not out of a declared concern for inadequacy of maternity facilities in Nigeria, but as a matter of course for him as a wealthy and powerful man: “He told her, “Of course you will deliver abroad,” and asked which she preferred, America or England” (*Americanah* 84). From elsewhere in the *Americanah* narrative, fragments of what these two metropolitan centres signify to Nigerians depicted in the narrative world are provided. The two are constantly associated with high culture and exempla of functional polity. For example, the fervour with which Obinze consumes information and products from American culture industry (films, magazines, television series, and literature) together with constant “jousting” with his mother about which is better between British

and American (*Americanah* 70–71), illuminate the allure of these two metropolitan centres to the Nigerians portrayed. A view of America as a diametric contrast to Nigeria, in terms of how its polity functions, is betrayed by Ifemelu’s father when he declares: “America creates opportunities for people to thrive. Nigeria can indeed learn a lot from them” (*Americanah* 205). Despite this image of England and America, there is also the impression that the two, for their allure, are only penetrable to the wealthy middle class Nigerians. In Obinze’s retrospective explanation of his flagging passion for anything American after amassing wealth, is a revelation of this selective penetrability:

“I realized I could buy America, and it lost its shine. When all I had was my passion for America, they didn’t give me a visa, but with my new bank account, getting a visa was very easy....”  
(*Americanah* 434)

Against this imagination of America and England, and the practical reality of highly regulated entry, penetrable only to the wealthy, The General’s asking Uju to *choose* between America and Britain for delivery of his child is indicative of his masculine potency and (as this is bound with his political and economic location in Nigeria’s military polity) class identity. He has not only breached boundaries securing these metropolitan centres’ venerated images, hence imprinting in his identity a social distinction as against common Nigerians for whom these boundaries are impenetrable because of their disabling economic lot. I seize upon this background as discourse situation within which to elucidate how Ifemelu, as the focal centre in *Americanah*, gauges herself as against others in her social environment, and how she evaluates emigration vis-à-vis her own social and economic lot. I argue that this class glamour casts a certain demeanour on Ifemelu’s as the focal centre, concerning adventure to the United States with regard to chances of realizing, or not, aspirations and desires that her community esteems. Her posturing in relation to these ambitions and yearnings are brought to sharp focus in the manner in which she reflects her chances of fulfilling the shared and esteemed aspirations. In anticipation of the import that this background has for apprehending the crisis attending her arrival in America, the next task is to seek a reconstruction of the focal character’s way of seeing migration vis-à-vis life chances, both of her own and of those of her friends. The aim is to reveal how focal contrasts construct Ifemelu’s view of migration in relation socio-economic opportunity. A view which, on one hand, sets her apart in her humble, non-mobile station from that of privileged mobile friends, and on the other hand how a cumulative socio-economic bind in her life and environment, together with cross-border connection now established with émigrés (such as her



aunt and her friend Ginika) precipitate a turnaround in her view of possibility of migration vis-à-vis her socio-economic opportunity. This would form the premises for asserting that conjunctural crisis encountered on subsequent arrival in Philadelphia owes to anticlimactic dissipation of aspirations scrambled to view by opportunity to move to America. These same aspirations are closely associated with Nigeria's social class experience and geographical imagination of America vis-à-vis the possibility of scaling such social class demarcations at home.

First, it is necessary to describe the focalization scheme that features in order to analytically realize these latent desires and aspirations critical for explicating Ifemelu's turning point in America. In Simpson's typology of narrative point of view, *Americanah* is generally a Category B narrative because of its heterodiegetic character (Simpson 51). The narrative agent is an omniscient narrator. However, our perception of the narrative universe varies depending on how specifically this omniscience is deployed throughout the text, either lodged within consciousness of a participating character or outside consciousness of any character in the narrative world (Simpson 51). As Genette and Simpson prompt us, focalization need not be fixed through the entire text, but there can be transitions from one focal lens to another or even a blurring of distinctions between focal lenses (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 191; Simpson 30). In critical approach to *Americanah* narrative here, this consideration is kept in mind, with analytic focus only invested in those critical phases of the focalising character's life pertinent in delineating the character's conjuncture.

Three considerations are kept in mind as guiding the choice of specific episodes in the narrative for the purpose of establishing premises on which of conjunctural moment is established. The first is the need to stay relevant to the discourse situation established above pertaining to social class, transnationalism and the outlook that it fosters generally, but specifically in Ifemelu. This consideration serves to locate the stage in the narration when the idea of migration, as a way of "closure" (Adéèkó 12), floats into her mental horizon. The second consideration is the need to keep within view the circumstances, both psychological and social, that directly relates to and helps explicate conjuncture of her arrival and settlement in the United States. Thirdly, it can be argued that to forego many other episodes in preference for one defeat the teleological functions of those episodes not interrogated as they may be points of incipience for conjuncture in narrative discourse. For these reasons, Ifemelu's experience within Nigeria's education system (at secondary school and at university,



both of which function in the narrative as a spaces where class boundaries are tempered by the levelling effect of merit-based education) is seminal in how America comes to assume the allure that it gathers in the eyes of Ifemelu.

It is during the early phase of her romantic relationship with Obinze, while at secondary school, that Ifemelu becomes exposed to the value attached to cross-border mobility in the world of the narrative. This is through interaction with her teenage friends in the school, most of whom are children of middle class Nigerian parents and others, like her close friend, Ginika, of American-Nigerian parentage. Ifemelu joins the school because of her academic excellence (*Americanah* 66), while the others inferably earned place in the school largely because of their middle class status: “Her primary school *had been different*, full of children like her, whose parents were teachers and civil servants, who took the bus and did not have drivers” (*Americanah* 66 emphasis added). This certainty about her socio-economic identification with fellow children during her primary school acts as a foil to her socio-economic status in secondary school. She admits that while in the secondary school “she felt sheathed in a translucent haze of difference” (*Americanah* 66), meaning she was aware of her humble social status.

Though as would be expected she would either be isolated or come to have a sense of inferiority, she easily mingles with her highly mobile friends, though constantly with hesitation because she perceives a class boundary between these friends and herself. From her perception of Kayode DaSilva, Yinka and Ginika<sup>32</sup>, the former two said to have the airs of the well-travelled because of their frequent shuttling between Nigeria, America and the United Kingdom, we do not infer any sense of envy nor regret for being of a lesser class than them. This is significant because of its denotative meaning that she knows her social place in which she is psychologically set. Instead there is a sense that she is non-perturbed by class hierarchy recognizable in the school environment. Her self-esteem in this regard is assured by the fact that, notwithstanding her humble social class background, she has alternative avenue for social recognition through the personally earned respectable social and academic stature because “she was popular, always on every party list, and always announced, during [school] assembly, as one of the “first three” in her class” (*Americanah* 66). Chapter five of the novel (when Ginika is about to depart

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<sup>32</sup> Kayode DaSilva is one of a clique of boys (calling themselves Big Guys) in her secondary school and friend to Ifemelu’s boyfriend, Obinze; Yinka is DaSilva’s girlfriend who also attends the school; Ginika is Ifemelu’s friend at the school, a future contact in America, and a child of American-Nigerian parentage.

for the United States) further corroborates this through Simpson's Category B narrative point of view. The chapter sets off in reflector positive mode as both Ifemelu and Ginika smart from guilt of having vied for one boyfriend, Obinze. In this context, with Ifemelu being victorious and Ginika conceding the loss, and with former as reflector, it is manifest that their friendship relationship weathers this discomfiting situation. This facilitates our obviation of any suspicion that each harbours ill-will or bitterness against the other.<sup>33</sup> The first three sentence structures of the chapter present a focal view from Ifemelu's angle, offering a glimpse of their feelings as mere discomfiture. Whereas Ginika's admission that she takes her losing Obinze to Ifemelu in stride may belie a rankling bitterness towards Ifemelu, this is invalidated by the narrative reiteration of the fact that she took this in stride:

After Kayode's party, Ginika was stilted; an alien awkwardness grew between them. "You know I didn't think it would happen that way," Ifemelu told her. "Ifem, he was looking at you from the beginning," Ginika said, and then, to show that she was fine with it all, she teased Ifemelu about stealing her guy without even trying (*Americanah* 64).

Her teasing attitude towards Ifemelu recurs every other instance the two make references to Obinze, as it is revealed that Ginika would often say: "Ifem, will you have time for us today or is it Obinze all the way" (*Americanah* 64). On her side, Ifemelu is beset with empathy for Ginika that is detectable in the use of words pointing to her thoughts and feelings: "Her breeziness was forced, laid on thickly, and Ifemelu *felt burdened* with guilt, and with a *desire* to overcompensate" (*Americanah* 64 emphasis added). Romance victory does not yield a sense of buoyancy but instead results in the opposite as she is burdened by empathy.

But in what reveals the value of emigration to metropolis rising in the horizon of her consciousness, when Ifemelu learns within the moment she is racked by guilt that Ginika is leaving for America, an impression is given that this opportunity is an opportune substitute prize for Ginika. If she values her newfound romantic relationship with Obinze, then as a compensatory reaction, her friend that she empathises with and cares for, deserves the even better prize of emigrating to America. Though at this stage of the narrative it has not yet occurred to her that emigration to America and pursuit of her

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<sup>33</sup>This can be seen as an early set up in the narrative where their friendship relations are preserved for plot development in later part of the narrative. Ginika would later be instrumental in facilitating Ifemelu's migration and settlement in America. It is Ginika who would make college applications in the United States on behalf of Ifemelu; Ginika is also later invaluable to Ifemelu as it is through the social network she has built over time that she secures the latter baby-sitting job in America.

desires and ambitions can be a possibility for a person of her class (who has no choice but pursue them in Nigeria) nonetheless, her selection of what to report from other characters' utterances (notably her parents) reinforces the pervasive belief that migrating to America is a mark of being "blessed" and of being "fortunate" (*Americanah* 65). Having been conditioned by her class position to view her needs, desires, aspirations and options for their achievement, as confined to class-bound orbit in Nigeria she lacks the language of migration. This recalls Davis and Harre's assertion concerning subject positioning. A subject's position in the discourse, they point out, circumscribes options and possibilities for occupier of that position (para.8). Unformed migration language subsequently stands out in the chapter as focal stance transition to neutral narratorial mode when focus shifts to Ginika's impending departure and as she is constantly mobbed by her jet-set friends and those envious of her privileged departure (*Americanah* 65–66).

As attention shifts to Ginika, especially when the Big Guys join them (Kayode, Obinze, Ahmed, Emenike and Osahon all, except Obinze, with regular shuttling between England, America and Nigeria, Ifemelu's focal consciousness withdraws to the background. In this narratorial neutral mode, we are presented with a long stretch<sup>34</sup> of objective report of verbatim interaction between the Big Guys and Ginika, with only the barest reporting phrase involving a reporting verb and its subject ("she told Ifemelu", "Priye said", "Ranyinudo said", "Emenike asked" "Yinka said", Ginika said" (*Americanah* 65)). Even though Ifemelu is part of the company, at no instance in this juncture does she partake in this genteel interaction. The exception is when some of this middle class gentility seem obvious to her as manifest hypocrisy as when everyone at school is vying to take Ginika to the tuck shop "as though her impending departure had made her even more desirable" (*Americanah* 65), a brief lapse into reflector negative mode. From this context, focal angle's lapse into reflector consciousness of Ifemelu enables access to the absurd dimensions of this excitement generated by Ginika's impending departure. However, to an extent, this reinforces the view that there is general tendency to want to align oneself, purely as a gesture of class identification, with those moving to the West. Other than this break, however, the overall narratorial neutral mode depicts Ifemelu as a withdrawn observer, one without the urbanity of the travelled and thus a class outsider among her ring of friends. This

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<sup>34</sup> This presentation of direct speech runs for approximately one and a half pages, where Ifemelu is reduced to a mere observer.

outsider status is corroborated subsequently in her unvoiced discomposure at her realization that there were things that others' parents possessed that hers did not:

As they walked, she wanted to tell Obinze that she didn't know what it meant to "be on your mother's passport", that her mother didn't even have a passport.

....

She remembered the surprise on Obinze's face, a surprise he had quickly shielded, when he asked, "What's your phone number?" and she replied, "We don't have a phone." (*Americanah* 66)

The focal decentering of her consciousness, through narratorial neutral mode, thus affirms her awkwardness in the company of "people who had gone abroad" as result preferring to remain on its interactional fringes (*Americanah* 67).

From the reflexive socio-economic awakening realized in the school environment, making her feel "sheathed in a haze of translucent difference" (*Americanah* 66), her awareness of inauspicious social and economic conditions within her family becomes increasingly sharp. First, from a keen observation of the courtesan life of her aunt, Uju, she is possessed by fright (*Americanah* 77), and "wished that she could wrest Auntie Uju away" (*Americanah* 83). Secondly, exacerbation in the lecturers' labour unrest introduces a sense of frustration. Thirdly, after her father loses his job, there is a deterioration in their already modest social and economic circumstances within the family, having to endure humiliation from the landlord who comes and bangs at their door loudly demanding rent payment from her father (*Americanah* 48-49, 75-76, 79).

Cast against this backdrop of heightened class consciousness, a fortuitous opportunity to relocate to America presents as an inconceivable opening, full of possibilities for fundamentally altering her social and economic lot. As the idea of emigration takes hold on her, so does her imagination of an altered social and economic station, notably dreaming of herself "in a house from the *Cosby Show*", a possibility of belonging to a class to which, hitherto while in school, she had perceived herself an outsider. As a marked difference from the narratorial neutral mode that profile her class alienation as detailed above, a sense of overwhelming breakthrough is palpable when the end of lecturers' strike is announced, fleshed out in the narratorial positive mode, characterised by prevalence of generic sentence structures:

The strike ended. Ifemelu returned to Nsukka, eased back into campus life, and from time to time, she dreamed of America. When Auntie Uju called to say that there were acceptance letters

and a scholarship offer, she stopped dreaming. She was too afraid to hope, now that it seemed possible. (*Americanah* 99)

The finality with which the ending of the strike is announced in the phrase “The strike ended” ushers in a quick, and unanticipated, succession of events, evoked in the quick succession of parallel clauses in the first sentence: “Ifemelu returned to Nsukka”, “eased back into campus life”, “she dreamed of America”. Another cascade of parallel clauses in the narration of the “triumphant ritual” of dividing her clothes amongst her friends, teems with palpable excitement: “*Ranyinudo, Priye and Tochi* were in her bedroom, [*they were*]drinking Coke, *her* clothes in a pile on the bed, and the first thing they all reached for was *her* orange dress, *her* favourite dress, *a gift* from Auntie Uju...” (*Americanah* 100 emphasis added). Effusions of delight, easily conveyed in the cascaded sentence structures, thus frame Ifemelu’s departure to the United States.

As already shown with Akunna’s experience in TAN, the impelling force of geographical imagination, upon which Ifemelu’s and her family’s certainties about their prosperity is built, is checked upon arrival in America by what the imagination obliterates. At first this curbing is limited to what is observed as against, correspondingly, what was merely imagined. These initial observations have yet no direct implications on aspirations propelling her, to the extent that these implications are not identifiable to her. As it appears to her, they are supposed to be mere aberrations of America: “the real America, she felt, was just around the next corner she would turn” (*Americanah* 111). As Auntie Uju drives her home from the airport at Flatlands in Brooklyn, she is confronted by what to her was uncharacteristic of America: “She stared at buildings and cars and signboards, all of them matt, disappointingly matt; in her imagination, the mundane things in America were covered in a high-shine gloss.” From this way of accommodating this unexpected reality, it is deducible that this is an unusualness that at best is only disappointing. But from the way the teenage boy, urinating against a wall, has been focalized, she is not ready to accept that she had just witnessed an American engaging in a public deviance:

She was startled, most of all, by the teenage boy in a baseball cap standing near a brick wall, face down, body leaning forward, hands between his legs. She turned to look again.

“See that boy!” she said. “I didn’t know people do things like this in America.”

“You didn’t know people pee in America?” Auntie Uju asked, barely glancing at the boy before turning to a traffic light. (*Americanah* 104)

The urination along a street has been estranged through a dismembering of the unitary event of urination into individual acts entailed in the process: “standing near a brick wall”, “face down”, “body leaning forward”, and “hands between his legs”. We only learn that it is a young American in the act relieving himself when her aunt pointedly names the act. From this reflector negative mode of focalization that defamiliarizes the act of urination as aberrant, is unveiled a view of her instinctive refusal to identify it as such, leaving room for it (by avoiding the naming of it) as possibly a configuration of acts which, she wants to hope, mean something different in America other than the abasing urination in the open street. The reflector negative mode in this context thus reveals her slippage into denial that will subsequently contribute to the complication of her settling down.

This slide into denial lends an aura of alienness to the neighbourhood where her aunt lives. As soon Aunt Uju and Dike are asleep, Ifemelu, possessed by curiosity wakes up to survey again the house and the street outside (*Americanah* 106). In this surveying, presented in a reflector negative stance, the imagined America is deferred. Like the event of urination in public, Flatlands is aberrated and denied Americanness (at least as she imagines America to be). It is worth recalling here that all along, before she leaves Nigeria, “America is America” to Ifemelu (*Americanah* 99), an undifferentiated social and economic utopia. By it merely being identified by a name other than the name America and more so in the manner it is identified (“Flatlands, Aunt Uju said this section of Brooklyn was called” (*Americanah* 106)), by inverting the sentence structure, with the object part of the predicate anteriorised, lends it a sarcastic and therefore contemptuous tinge as well as projecting her uncanny experience of Flatlands:

Flatlands, Aunt Uju said this section of Brooklyn was called. The street below was poorly lit, bordered not by leafy trees but by closely parked cars, nothing like the pretty street on *The Cosby Show*. Ifemelu stood there for a long time, her body unsure of itself, overwhelmed by a sense of newness. But she felt, also, a frisson of expectation, an eagerness to discover America. (*Americanah* 106)

America is therefore again deferred, yet to be discovered. She anticipates that she would ultimately realize the utopian American living when she starts schooling in Philadelphia, a life that would be “full of bliss, where all problems had sparkling solutions” (*Americanah* 113 see also 122). But as it turns out this idyllic imagination comes to collapse.

## Leveraging the bottom-line tenets

Before embarking of how her precarious juncture unfolds, one other important ingredient to this precarity needs to be located in the characters' personality traits. One characteristic trait that distinguishes Ifemelu, and which Obinze finds endearing, is her being rebellious or being "too much trouble" (*Americanah* 51–53) and, what can be extrapolated from this, her independence and thus self-reliance. Even while newly in America, she attaches great value to securing personal space for herself. She feels relieved to leave Aunt Uju's home, where as a result of her own (Uju's) predicaments, she has grown more stifling: "she wanted to leave Aunt Uju's apartment and begin a life in which she alone determined the margins" (*Americanah* 120). Independence, self-reliance, the drive not only to live American utopian live, but also the impulsive need to rescue social and economic lot of her parents in Nigeria thus condition her move to Philadelphia. But this streak of independence and self-reliance becomes the impulse by which she edges away from the social resources she needs to adjust as she slips into asocial periphery that precipitates a depression. When she arrives in Philadelphia to start school, Ginika, whom from her background in Nigeria we understand as economically better anchored in America for having an American mother and a father with a "teaching job" (*Americanah* 65) in Missouri (implying better access to social capital in America) offers to accommodate her and even offers to pay for Ifemelu's clothing. But she turns this down, appraising herself as self-sufficient: "I'll manage," Ifemelu said. And she would. If she needed to, she would wear all her clothes at the same time, in layers, until she found a job" (*Americanah* 125). But as she is rejected in successive job interviews, in the private sphere she has carved in quest for independence, her slide into depression is accelerated. The erasure of middle class fantasy from the narrative signals disillusionment as the practical realities of sustaining herself assault her earlier denial. As dire financial circumstances constrain her rent and school fees obligations, so does a sense of inferiority and social alienation begin to assail her, aggravated by the experience of prejudice, which is her first direct experience, in the apartment she shares with three assaultive young American women. This is perceptible in the reflector negative mode of focalization through which her settling in with the three women is focalized. From her description, the environs where she has rented a room is haunted by drug addicts and the specific room she has settled into was "the smallest," an implicit acknowledgement of a compromise of the kind of house from *The Cosby Show*. From the insinuations and body language of these three women, Ifemelu's sense of inferiority begins to take root, similarly as her social estrangement widens. When



asked by Elena, one of the housemates, why Ifemelu had not petted her dog, the former seizes on her reply to make a disparaging intimation that she (Ifemelu) has some quaint cultural relation with dogs. Elena's facial expression ensuing from this insinuation seems to conform to a pattern that she has gathered from the other young women, a language from which she constructs her inferiority:

“Oh,” Elena said, and looked at her, brows furrowed, as Jackie and Allison had earlier looked at her when she said she had never gone bowling, as though wondering how she could have turned out a normal human being without ever having gone bowling. She was standing at the periphery of her own life, sharing a fridge and a toilet, a shallow intimacy, with people she did not know at all. (*Americanah* 128)

This pattern of reflecting inferiority on herself emerge again when they are preparing to attend a party and the question of propriety of dressing comes up. As the three women are dressed in “slouchy jeans” Ifemelu's well-meant question about their dressing elicits a laugh that, from Ifemelu's view, “suggested yet another foreign pathology had emerged” (*Americanah* 128). From these it is discernible that Ifemelu is socially alienated, a conditioning that facilitates her imagination of herself as a lesser being. Though there remains a possibility that the women's facial expressions are implicatures of their superciliousness, at no instance is this expressed. As she must meet her financial obligations and her basic subsistence, she has to secure financial resources at whatever cost, including engaging in a sexual activity, which mark her turning point in her conjuncture of arrival in America. Suffice to say that job-seeking dejection, social alienation together with her own counterproductive bid for independence and self-reliance, and the hope that her moving to America would occasion prosperity for her and at home, conjoin to complicate her experience of settling down.

Whereas Ifemelu's inherent personality trait of independence function as a double, burdensome yet efficacious adaptation resource, Akunna's resoluteness and daring in ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’ make the difference between suffering the exploitative hospitality of a familiar compatriot and taking the risk to forge new beneficial acquaintances in an alien society. Akunna's decisiveness and audacity sees her abandon the hitherto perceived safety of a relative and fellow Nigerian's household for the uncertainty of the unknown Connecticut. The rape by her uncle, looked at in comparison to dissolution of the hitherto impelling American imagination, marks a great turning point in her life in America, precipitating this bold step to fend for herself. Sexual appropriation is presented as a mechanism to initiate her into patriarchal subject position of woman in the context of her precarity as an immigrant in custody of an opportunistic fellow black immigrant. It is noteworthy that the uncle

does not only take advantage of her as a vulnerable Nigerian immigrant woman (more so as a putative uncle), but he is also an opportunist to the extent that he relishes exploiting the desperate bid by the company he works for “to look diverse” by having him as a black person in its workforce (“TAN’ 115–16). Therefore, rather than assume the subject position within an household familiar to her in great degree, Akunna opts to take the greater risk of plunging into the unexplored world outside this household, “walking the long windy road” then boarding a bus whose destination she does not know. As the bus’s last stop is at Connecticut, she alights and randomly walks into a restaurant and asks to be employed on her own terms (she would want to be paid “two dollars less than the other waitresses” (“TAN’ 117). Opting to make a brazen exit from the known but oppressive, where the uncle “would do many things” for her (“TAN’ 117), to the unknown is a bold and resolute rejection of common knowledge about how women achieve success and the route towards that success. Therefore, rather than destroy her, rape precipitates resoluteness and audacity as first-line resources in encountering America.

But this random move in itself, independent from her resoluteness and boldness of decision, brings her into the hands of Juan, the restaurant owner who understands the difficult experience of settling down as an immigrant in America, apparently having been an immigrant himself (“He knew, he’d been there” (“TAN’ 117). In a gesture, which conforms to what Phillimore et al identify as norm-based reciprocity in explaining modalities by which migrants exchange resources (220)<sup>35</sup>, Juan appraises her as hardworking as he thinks that all immigrants generally are and, therefore, not only offers her a job but he pays her more than she has asked for (“He paid you a dollar less ...” rather two dollars less (“TAN’ 117) and is also ready to protect her from any threat to her security (“TAN’ 119). Thus a decision to seek employment by chancing is doubly rewarded in getting the job and in getting into the hands of an established fellow migrant who has a sense of solidarity with other struggling migrants. With waitressing, Akunna comes to a threshold of being in charge of the course of her life. She rents a room, which while it does not conform to pre-migration imagination of an American home, stabilizes her from the initial disorientation. It is only from then on that she is able to regain a sense of direction, a degree of orienting sobriety which enables her to evaluate available opportunities vis-à-vis her

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<sup>35</sup> For Phillimore et al, norm-based reciprocity is based on “repeated and more or less balanced resource exchange between known others” (220). In this context balance relates to amount of work done vis-à-vis monetary value as reward for the work done.

psychological energy and career aspiration. As an indication of this, she is able to improvise a way out in her pursuit of higher aspirations of educating herself by visiting a public library and scouring websites of various schools from where she obtains course syllabi with reading lists which she sets herself to reading ('TAN' 117). This is because there is no community college in Connecticut, and enrolling in state university is prohibitively expensive. Her daring and single-mindedness thus occasion a move out of assaulting familial household to a more protective and empowering work place at Juan's restaurant.

In order to understand the unnarrated but inherently entailed non-conscious psychological processes by which the focalizing centres in *Americanah* and 'The Thing around Your Neck' achieve command of the experience of dislocation, a resort to the understanding of the experience of dislocation as a trauma-engendering event is resourceful. Trauma is a significant "unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation" (Mambrol, para.12). For its unrepresentability and unspeakability, narratives of trauma as those of migrant dislocation in focus here, demand unique narrative strategies because of their "strange absence yet ghost-like presence in consciousness" (Mambrol 12). The focalising displaced characters thus grapple with a transnationally fragmented sense of self and home (including associated values and attitudes) and their attempt to understand themselves and new values become a disjunctive memory, reflected in the disjunct narrative structures (entailing analepses and prolepses, for example, which are widespread in the two texts under scrutiny in this chapter). In this characteristic grappling with destabilising experience in transnational location, direct referentiality of what enters into the narrative (such as the content of analepsis or prolepsis) is disrupted and their significances become resituated in our understanding (Caruth 11). As the focal protagonists' attempt to resituate these significant elements through the "interrupted referentiality" of the elements, the meaning of the past is only gestured at in the narrative discourse as a performative rendition of that meaning (Mambrol, para.13). The unexpected juxtapositions and disjunct temporal movements that trauma permits is in itself "a kind of politics in action" (Dalley 372). In this sense, the presented elements are viewed as vehicles for a discursive meaning which exceeds that in the individual elements presented. Narrative discourse elements ranging from analepses, prolepses, in conjunction with the present of the narrative, thus work as units on which the discursivity of the meaning of experience in transnational location is constructed. In this chapter an interrogation of the diverse ways of seeing brought to dialogue in narrative structures and

narrative movements of *Americanah* and ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’ is conducted. The operative question is: why does the narrative disjunctively present protagonists who see differently at different points in the narrative? This is to ask the question why the narratives present protagonists who are clearly wiser at one point, then lapse into presenting the same protagonist being less so only to overpass this latter one for another?

Even though the position taken in this dissertation is that characters actively work to mobilize vital adjustment resources, cognizance is taken of Finkelstein’s study of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel which focused on psychopathological implications of resources loss and resource gain as a result of migration and settlement (328). In the empirical study, Finkelstein sought to establish the correlation between resource loss and resource gain on one hand, and immigrant’s mental health on the other. Contrary to the emphasis here that net gain of resources predict positive outcome in migrant adjustment, Finkelstein’s study found that this was not the case with the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants (334). His findings should, however, be viewed in the light of the cross-sectional and longitudinal experience characteristics of the sample studied. The sample had a traumatic history as a result of ethnic persecution while still within Ethiopia, including a traumatic exit process (unlike in Adichie’s narratives), compounded by their ethnic and racial positions in places of settlement in Israel. Therefore, these implicate diametrically opposed migration dynamics. Whereas the Ethiopians’ migration was aided by Israeli government, during departure and settlement, relocating characters in Adichie’s works are not traumatic subjects in the same way as the Ethiopians respondents. Adichie’s migrant depart in circumstances in abundant with optimism. Also, whereas resource loss and resource gain processes in Finkelstein’s study are mustered so as to explain psychopathological reactions among the immigrants (330), the same is approached here to demonstrate that focalizing characters as immigrants adapting to difficult new contexts, integrate resource loss experience into their schema, subsequently weaving them into processes of social remittance generation.

On the other hand, a subsequent interest in writing letters to her parents, relatives and friends back in Nigeria, indicated in a proleptic shift in the narrative to a later time, signal an abatement, over time, of this grief which arguably permits her to rehabilitate her own capacity to note and make sense of peculiar tendencies in American social environment: “In later weeks, though, you wanted to write because you had stories to tell” (‘TAN’ 118). She begins to muster a social acuity rooted in her

differential location, betwixt and between being Nigerian and the confronting American social environment filtering in to her nascent social consciousness. From this interstitial standpoint we have a glimpse of the constitutive characteristics of the American society. One of the striking observations she makes is about child upbringing, with the no-nonsense enforcement of discipline in Nigeria contrasted with negotiational approach in America. Striking is also the difference in modalities of wealth signification, with indications that these modalities are diametric:

You wanted to write about the rich people who wore shabby clothes and tattered sneakers, who looked like the night watchmen in front of the large compounds in Lagos. You wanted to write that rich Americans were thin and poor Americans were fat .... ('TAN' 118-19)

Even though these two realizations of aspects of American society may not have immediate import in her social exercise in there, other than as an observational act indicative of her growing capacity to configure this new social context, what she gathers differentially about social trust is crucial in tracing how she forms critical social relations at Connecticut. Social trust in America is projected as socially free-ranging unlike in Nigeria where it only circulates within kinship circles:

You wanted to write about the surprising openness of people in America, how eagerly they told you about their mother fighting cancer, about their sister-in-law's preemie, the kinds of things that one should hide or should reveal only to the family members who wished them well. (118)

From this narrative statement, can be gleaned a particular orientation to American people as a matter of generalization that augurs well for her settlement as it becomes evident in her establishing a romantic trust in her relationship with the unnamed white American. To express surprise rather than shock at the openness of Americans is to betray an admiration for this trust liberated from familial boundaries, while at the same time passing a deprecatory judgement on the practice of hiding such critical life statuses from public view as sign of lack of trust outside familial space in general rather than as a gesture of privacy.

Against the background of conjunctural loss of home and the inhospitability of the new one, evident resolution of resultant anomie can be deduced through a revisiting of the trinitarian conceptualization of second person narrative. From this presumption, it will become evident how the focalizing centre has assimilated (assimilation in the sense as used by Stiles to suggest psychic accommodation) the adverse experience of being a migrant into her personality and thus realizing a composite personality more adaptable to her transnational location. To deem the narratee as having been erroneous in

thinking of America in terms at odds with its reality as it is lived, is to position herself not only as a survivor out of this adversity of arrival and (un)settling, but also as a philosophical persona enriched by the recollected experience rather than debilitated by it. For this enrichment, she can now position herself as an admonishing raconteur, unravelling the follies of overstretching her imagination of other places and its peoples, rather than as a devastated subject trapped between a lost home and an alien world. This enunciation of an error in her inexperienced protagonist-self's thought pattern reflects on the enunciator's personality as a triumphant sum total of folly of protagonist-self and resilience of narratee in the process of becoming wiser partly because of living through contradictions emergent from how she perceived her Nigerian and American worlds, and partly because an inner mature voice holds her forth for reprove by means of her own story. By how the narrator constructs the protagonist's and narratee's world view, therefore, it is manifest the narrator's own standpoint in relation to being migrant, especially of absurdities and vulnerabilities of being newly on a migration course.

### **(Un)masking the (un)familiar transparencies**

In keeping with Bhabha's appropriation of Derridean deconstructive movement of doubling, functions of liminal space relative to the aim here of describing emergence of focalising centres' agency is approached as ambivalent, interrogative, negotiatory and calculative in its operation. The activity to do with masking, together with its object having to do with conditioning transparencies are both approached as articulating spatio-temporal differences as focalized by Ifemelu. This necessitate the use of bracketing that gestures at this double movement of the activity as the well as of the double nature of object of this activity. Having examined the conjunctural moment in experience of the focalising centres, attention now narrows down to the liminal element in this moment and how this moment in turn yields to the respective focalising centres' insertion within prevailing discursive structures underpinning social order at points of settlement in America. Discursive structures here suggest those modes that govern social relations at those places of arrival and settlement, explored in chapter one principally as racism, class stratification and gender formation.

Dislocation, as it happens with Ifemelu's flight from Nigeria to US, occasion liminality in terms of how the new place is experienced vis-à-vis home place. The subject of focus (the objectified signifier)

is raised as stark relief against the place as its background. An uncanny disjunction between the signifier (urinating in public space, for example) and the signified (America subjectively constructed as quintessential place of order, well-being and wealth) arises. This liminal space becomes a location from which to disavow both the subjective construction as well as that from which a critique of actual American world is launched. In this sense threshold marks itself as strategic space to construct new modes of engagement (and thus a point of emanation of forms and content of social remittance) through insertion within discursive social structures at receiving context and at the same time absence from the physical reality of the similarly configuring forces of home. In *Americanah*, a liminal space first becomes manifest in Ifemelu's experience of Brooklyn and Auntie Uju's home and, by extrapolation, in the impact of first impressions of America. The first sight that conveys this spatio-temporal threshold is that of a teenager urinating in the open. The utter shock at the sight expresses an incipient juncture of double movement of engagement and disengagement as consistency of focalization itself become disjunctive. To be shocked at such sight is to indicate a perceived incongruence between the place the object is seen and the object itself. On the other hand, there are clear pointers that such an act in public is not uncanny in itself. Rather its uncanny occurrence owes to what Bhabha constantly terms articulation of difference in which each element, in mutual relation, constantly shuttle between being figure and being background (Bhabha 1, 112, 114, 149, 162, 176, 254).<sup>36</sup> When Ifemelu, in disbelief, utters "I didn't know that people do *things* like this *in* America" is to evince the view that such things as urinating in the open are one among many other inane things figuring (and no less disfiguring) the moral order of Lagos body politic inasmuch as they have sedimented onto the contours of this moral order. To be shocked, therefore, at a displaced familiar sight is to manifest liminality wherein objectification of familiar transparencies that constitute the normal flow of consciousness materialise. In this sense, by being startled at what she sees, Ifemelu exhibits a mode of disengagement from the "familiar transparencies" of Lagos (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 111), yet now positioned to engage anew with Lagos moral order revealing itself

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<sup>36</sup>Articulateness in Bhabha's usage suggests the hinging mechanism that underlies his other concept of ambivalence. This idea of articulation, for example pervades the chapter 'Articulating the archaic: Cultural difference and colonial nonsense' of *The Location of Culture* (123–38)



before her as the uncanny.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, to the extent that American image brought with her from Nigeria, is marked with heightened perfection, the actual Brooklyn street order reveals itself as an uncanny figure against the background of the urinating teenager. Adding to this liminal disjuncture is the uncanny assumption of national identity by the cockroach she happens to encounter in Uju's kitchen. As vermin, it is exterminated in the spaces it invades in Lagos kitchen, but now that it has recrudesced in Uju's kitchen as American being (in essence symbolic symptom of filth in America's social fabric) threatening the hallowed America space encased in her view, it is spared extermination, hence retaining a glaring symbolic verminous relief standing out from its background of Ifemelu's phantasmal American image. Equally, the revelation that such as verminous presence in Nigeria (again taken as symbolic embodiment of social filth symptom) would merely be stamped out, *qua* symptom, deconstructively communicate a focal stance that Nigerians deny the deep seated ills, instead preferring symptomatic solutions. It is by virtue of liminal location, therefore, that both America, hitherto bestowed a privileged image, and Nigeria figured as the diametric contradiction to the former, take on uncanny dimension. From this in-between location, rather than revealing themselves as diametrically opposed to each other, Nigeria and America concretize with a disorienting verisimilitude in need of pressing redemption. In this instance, liminality is realized in her being divested of immediacy of conditioning habit of Lagos (familiar transparencies) and disjuncture between anticipated world of America and its unanticipated raw version.

In addition, spatio-temporal disjuncture constituting her as liminal personae engenders in her a heightened sense of unhomeliness as henceforth "her mind [remained] too alert to the newness of things" and "her body unsure of itself .... But she felt, also, a frisson of expectation, and eagerness to discover America" (*Americanah* 106). Bordering on thrill, this liminal experience attend her initial moment upon landing in Brooklyn, even as she persists in deferring her arrival<sup>38</sup> under the liminal posture that "the real America [residing in her subjective image] ... was [still] just around the corner she would turn" (*Americanah* 111). As a phase in her life attesting to what Turner asserts as dissolution of social distinctions, Ifemelu identifies with Dike, a child, as an equal: "He was a mere child, but she

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<sup>37</sup>Since the aim at this point is to outline Ifemelu's liminal moment, the agentic import of this moment will here be deferred to a later section of this chapter where such agency will be grasped as one form of social remittance.

<sup>38</sup> This is an appropriation of Boersma and Schinkel's phrase "postponed arrival" to denote the view that migrants are always seen as in a state of perpetual arrival, though never arriving, relative to the values of the hosts (309-10).

felt, with him, a kinship close to friendship; they watched his favourite cartoon shows together ... and they read books together” (*Americanah* 111; Turner 95). Though this may be taken as an instinctive response to her loneliness and therefore being content with juvenile company, considering that this is revealed within the same breath as when she admits that:

There was a stripped-down quality to her life, a kindling starkness, without parents and friends and home, *the familiar landmarks that made her who she was* (*Americanah* 111 emphasis mine)

This is instructive of her spatio-temporal disorientation, self-consciously attributed to loss of physical home place, its sociality and what she refers to as familiar landmarks, which can be interpretively exploited here as metaphoric reification of Foucault’s familiar transparencies as the semiotic order overdetermining identity and social relations in Lagos. Even as she is unmoored from home, she is yet unfledged, even naïve, with reference to American society, especially concerning racial and class hierarchy. Unfledged in this context is used to suggest the fact that Ifemelu is bodily yet undisciplined or lacking social habitus the characterize America’s discursive social space structured by racism and class distinction.<sup>39</sup> Here “[n]othing was familiar” she admits, even including her own aunt with whom they have been communicating while Ifemelu was still at home in Nigeria, and who has now become unreadable (*Americanah* 109). When Jane, a fellow immigrant from Grenada and Aunt Uju’s neighbour with whom Ifemelu initially enjoy companionship, points to the raced locality of Flatlands, the latter is perplexed. While revealing to her their plans to “move [away from Flatlands, apparently predominated by blacks] to the suburbs” Jane seem to take it for granted that Ifemelu understands America’s racial order (*Americanah* 112). Off-handedly, as if conversing with one already imprinted with America’s common sense of racism, Jane inadvertently fingers at the fundamental social order of which Ifemelu is oblivious but into which she would be initiated when she subsequently takes subject position.

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<sup>39</sup>Reference to disciplining here points to Foucault’s usage of the term as practices serving discursive power imperatives by having effects of the practices embodied through lived experience. These practices of disciplining Foucault avers, results in a “body that is manipulated, shaped, trained” (such as through chromaticism, hairism) as “object and target of power” and therefore instituting a subject resident within such a body (*Discipline and Punish* 136). Bourdieu’s habitus gesture to the end-product of these disciplinary practices, namely those “durable, transposable *dispositions*” (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 72 emphasis in the original)

The initial thrill of being in-between, transforms into bafflement and in turn, as America outside of her subjective imagination, fraught with violence, filters in to her through television, she hinges between puzzlement and apprehension (*Americanah* 113-14). Initially, immunity to America's reality amidst her insular postponement of arrival owes to the fact that she is largely circumscribed by relative security of Aunt Uju's accommodation. Her sense of being neither here (America) nor there (Nigeria) thus generally present no significant existential threat as she is insulated by her aunt's residence, save for the latter's fraught personality which is an accretion of her own frustrations in social life (as she struggles to have a marriage partner) and career (as she has been struggling to pass her medical examination). However, freedom to explore, as opposed to hospitality, and particularly an unfettered resolve to pursue the insistent American imagination exercise a strong compulsion on her. There is indication that residing at her aunt's comes with limited latitude: "... she wanted to leave Aunt Uju's apartment, and begin a life in which she alone determined the margins" (*Americanah* 120). This compulsion for independence, arguably, is informed less by a quest for independence and enrolment in college than by the insistent craving to arrive in America, catalysed by the entailed liminal thrill. Before actually leaving Aunt Uju's residence the hankering to arrive is registered five times (*Americanah* 111, 113, 119, 120 and 122), foregrounding it as the principal driving force in her movement.

Ifemelu's move away from the ironically inimical but insular hospitality of Aunt Uju leads her to Philadelphia a symbolic arena in the narrative for her realization of a seminal sense of control vis-à-vis her liminal disjuncture and within the equally adverse racialized American social milieu. Uju's residence is insular in the sense that she has yet to savour the time of there and then of being in Brooklyn as an immigrant (as opposed to calcified time and place of America constructed out the social exigencies of being in Nigeria as examined in chapter three). At Uju's she is yet to engage in a denuded strive for survival within the "time filled full by the now-time" of Brooklyn as Walter Benjamin puts it, but is shielded by the fraught but instrumental experience of Uju. For example, over time the latter has learnt why and what to buy in a store (she "never bought what she needed; instead she bought what was on sale and made herself need it" or how and why to act in a certain manner towards or in presence of white people: she puts on a "nasal, sliding accent" while speaking to or in presence of white Americans (*Americanah* 108)). The point here is that if Ifemelu's liminality while at Uju's is vitalized by thrill, and expectation whetted by possibility of easy achievement now uncannily lurking before her ("just around the next corner she would turn" (*Americanah* 111), a life "full of bliss,

where all problems had sparkling solutions in shampoos and cars and packaged foods” (*Americanah* 113), that she comes to experience upon moving to Philadelphia and which can be pursued as significantly productive of form and content of social transfers, is animated by distress and anguish.

## **Emergence of negotiatory agent: Becoming black woman being Nigerian-American**

In chapter two, discourses regulating social boundaries (as Bhabha would put it (172)) in Brooklyn and Philadelphia as Ifemelu’s points of material arrival in America (rather than the perpetually deferred psychological arrival) were explored. These were racism, class stratification and androcentric order. These discourses are recouped here as determining frames or modes of identification prevailing in Brooklyn and Philadelphia as places she materialises as black immigrant. The purpose is to seize upon liminality as elucidated above in revisiting the productive social relations that Ifemelu enters into within contexts overdetermined by these prevailing determining frames or modes of identification. The baseline in this synthesis of liminality against these determining frames is the description of the processes by which she attains mastery of her precarious position as a black Nigerian woman in America.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, examining Ifemelu’s manoeuvring into an intersectional position (as black woman from Nigeria) cross-interpellated by these discursive determining forces reveals “the return of the subject agent, as the interrogative agency in the catachrestic position” (184). Here Bhabha appropriates catachresis in grafting liminal location as enabling the subject a foothold for (dis)engagement as a double movement (of engagement with the new regulatory discourses in America and disengagement and at the same time engagement with those at homeland).<sup>41</sup> Return as used by Bhabha gestures at the psychoanalytic concept of retroactiveness or afterwardness of signified or meaning in the present “moment of concluding” (Lacan 257), which for Bhabha refers to identity as constantly crystalizing in retroversion within the (un)folding present as an after-effect.

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<sup>40</sup>As the theoretical framework deployed here is Bhabha’s which adapts Jacques Lacan’s conception of the process of signification (Lacan 681 and subsequent pages), (identification/subject formation for Bhabha) what is referred to here as identification discourses, determining frames or discourse regulating social boundaries hark back to Lacan’s Symbolic Order.

<sup>41</sup>Here Bhabha is adapting Jacques Derrida’s idea of catachresis. Derrida’s catechresis refers to appropriation of one sign, already functioning to convey one sense, to convey another or new sense (Derrida 57–58). Therefore, such a sign becomes lodged between its original sense and the new one, from which, therefore, Bhabha derives his own idea of in-between, threshold or liminal location of the subject.

In chapter two, two events were considered for their pivotal bearing on Ifemelu's material experience of arrival. First the ambivalent though shattering encounter with Ardmore tennis coach was approached as offering an androcentric frame animating the coach's appropriation of Ifemelu's body as object of his leisure. In the current section this androcentric sublation of Ifemelu's body is appraised as force that "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 4). In this context identity, system and order refers to Ifemelu's own structure of values transplanted to America, both as worldview imprinted in her and in the corporeality of her body, stultified through the tennis coach's androcentric gaze, opening her corporeality to herself as abject, hence a split in self into a precipitated interrogative self beholding the abject and the abjected corporeal self. To Kristeva the abject becomes the other of the superego within the triad of self (ego, body, and superego) in which "discourse will seem tenable only if it (superego) ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 6). In abjection and the abject, Kristeva avers that the abject, repellent and repelled, become culturally productive, or in her own words they become "safety railings. Seeds of my culture" (Kristeva, 'Approaching Abjection' 126). The second pivotal event is the overwrought intersubjective confrontation between Ifemelu and Laura as a reification of the struggle within the discursive intersubjective identification central of which is the hegemonizing invisible whiteness.

What Kristeva posits concerning abjection and the abject concretizes in Ifemelu's ambivalent relation with the tennis coach. Before embarking on sketching this abjection, and as a way of linking it with in-between location described above, it is noted here that the locus of this in-between lies in spatial and temporal planes, a space external to Ifemelu's consciousness as a focalising agent (though interrelated with internal environment of her experiencing self). In the spatial and temporal plane threshold experience is limited to what the five common senses can perceive, namely the estrangement from home (uncanny urinating youth, uncanny cockroach, to name a few) and estrangement from the identity determining order in Nigeria (the absent familiar landmarks that sustain her identity). At this point it is necessary to link threshold experience at this level to that occasioned by abjection aroused in Ifemelu by her sexual engagement with the tennis coach. Foucault reminds us of the centrality of body in formation of the subject: "for norms to be effective, discourses are insufficient – they must be experienced and embodied" (Wehrle 56). Arguably, therefore external space and temporality including discursive power formations that map this spatio-temporality would be non-consequential

without appurtenance of the body which is here conceived of in its carnality and its chromaticity. It is thus pertinent to trace the necessary and inevitable traumatic imploding of external liminal experience into the internal space circumscribed by the body and which by such implosion engenders a radical subjectivity.

From the very outset meeting the tennis coach is a liminal experience in itself, registered in the profundity of narrative statement of this first meeting: “she was now alone with a strange man in the basement of a strange house in America” (*Americanah* 143). His image and motions come at Ifemelu’s consciousness with an uncanny darkness. He does not only come out strikingly as mere human with an apparent inadequacy but in his human nature emerges an additional nefarious being. Whereas a view of him here concretizes through Ifemelu’s conceptual schema yielding a nefarious being, the coach’s way of seeing as a man with rights over a woman’s body has this apparent nefariousness justified as standard way of claiming his rights, as already indicated above. Category B Reflector (N) mode by which this encounter is presented offers a view of his naked humanity as narcissistic, amusingly tensed and hovering on the verge of danger:

... he walked back and forth with short quick steps, talking about how much in demand he was as a tennis coach, and Ifemelu thought he might trip on the stacks of sports magazines on the floor. She felt dizzying just watching him. (*Americanah* 143)

In this naked human nature, more so revealed by his wicked bearing (as it appears to Ifemelu), his repugnant body, marked by “stubby finger with his bitten-back nail”, bears on her vision (*Americanah* 155). The significance of this arcane appearance of him to Ifemelu becomes clearer in casting this image against that of an ideal Caucasian man sketched later on by Ifemelu at the point she reflects on her realization of what ordinarily the racialized American society would not countenance. Having had a romantic relationship with Curt, a model white male meant for a model white woman,<sup>42</sup> and having by her own volition ended the relationship, she is overwhelmed by her own success at flouting racial boundaries and having a sense of satisfaction that she is in charge of this transgression. So together with Curt’s actual personality that Ifemelu comes to know in the course of their relationship (“infantile” and naïve (*Americanah* 197-98)), and with the image of the tennis coach, as against the ideal male

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<sup>42</sup>Curt is said to be not just “white, it was the kind of white he was, the untamed golden hair and handsome face, the athlete’s body, the sunny charm and the smell, around him, of money” hence attracting tacit reproach from white women who feel “a great tribal loss” by virtue of Ifemelu (a black woman) having him as his boyfriend (*Americanah* 292).

whiteness embodied by Curt, reveal the humanity of white men that disabuses her of imagined superiority. This is especially important against Ifemelu's phantasmal conception of America and Americans.

From the bare human being ("short, his body a glut of muscles, his hair thinning and sun-bleached" (*Americanah* 143)) uncanny body before her emerges a degenerate man. This is as much as can be derived from her focal angle. This venal image, however, changes if we shift focalization of this encounter to that of the coach, a perspective that reveals itself at the moment he feels a rash of impatience when Ifemelu fails to pick the cue about the sexual nature of the work he has on offer:

"Look you're not a kid," he said. I work so hard I can't sleep. I can't relax. I don't do drugs, so I figured I need help to relax. You can give me a massage, help me relax, you know.  
(*Americanah* 144)

To nudge her to shift her way of seeing herself as "not a kid" is to prod her to partake of his conceptual view which, as will be demonstrated shortly, takes the form of androcentric normativity. In his utterance "Look, you're not a kid," .... "I work so hard I can't sleep. I can't relax" effuses an unambiguous prevailing mode of knowledge, and therefore power in which hardworking men seeking rejuvenation and recreation are entitled to service from others in whom the determining androcentric order compel to embody and by so embodying discharge them as and when required by men. As a metaphorical construction threatening an adult identity with puerile one, it aims at conjuring in Ifemelu an abashing contrast (child/adult) in questions of which women determined by male gaze are expected to grasp as a matter of common sense. By confronting her with puerility, therefore, he engages in subtly manoeuvring her, by means of humiliating prodding, to slip into position as a woman, with such position presenting to his view as a normative way of seeing man-woman relation. It is worthy here to recall Davies and Harre's argument that a subject position entails "*conceptual repertoire* and a location for persons within the *structure of rights* for those that use that repertoire" (para.8 emphasis mine) where repertoire entails an entire range of common sense available to an individual within a discursive power structure in which rights apply unequally to positions distributed within that discursive formation. It is against this understanding of structure of rights that his conduct becomes comprehensible as an invocation of rights inalienably due to him as positioned within the constitutive conceptual repertoire and which is effused in his "brusque", "perfunctory" and commanding demeanour:



When she arrived at his house, his manner was brusque. "Come on up," he said .... He offered her something to drink, in a perfunctory way that suggested he expected her to say no, and then took off his shirt and lay on bed ....

"Come over here," he said. "I need to be warm." ....

"Can you do twice a week? I'll cover your train fare," he said stretching and dismissive; he wanted her to leave. (17)

Brusqueness, perfunctoriness and command within this understanding of structure of rights correspond not to aberrant personality but convey a standard way of seeing oneself as covered by the right to women. To the tennis coach the conceptual repertoire for him as a man manifests in his commonsensical view that his rejuvenation is tied to a woman's body (Ifemelu) a body that to him is deliberately failing to take the cue and thus merely playing the kid. But Ifemelu is not yet initiated into his particular androcentric order, be it as we have traced her while in Nigeria (where we know that her aunt, Uju, and friend, Ranyinudo, already 'play' by sexual symbiotism with The General and Ndudi/Don, respectively). Without attempting to speak for the other woman the tennis coach has had sexual liaison with, nonetheless it is possible to determine the conceptual repertoire by which they are relegated, whether as positioned subjects or as conscious of their being sexually exploited. This ways of seeing is deducible from the utterance of the coach:

"...You can give me a massage, help me relax, you know. I had somebody doing it before, but she moved to Pittsburgh. *It's a great jig, at least she thought so. Helped her with a lot of her college debt.*" He had said this to many other women, she could tell, from the measured pace with which the words came out. He was not a kind man. *She did not know exactly what he meant, but whatever it was, she regretted that she had come.* (*Americanah* 144 emphasis mine)

From Ifemelu's perception that the man is malignant, it opens the possibility that these other woman were co-opted into the sexual liaison through the wielding his power (androgenic and financial). In this instance, the power to name one as infantile or to bestow redeeming womanly reason is prerogative of man. For example, in his remark "It's a jig, at least she thought so. Helped her with a lot of her college debt" in addition to inscribing apparently simple instrumental rationality into his other woman victim (projecting their focal angle from his own), he is also strategically dramatizing subject position of a woman as an offering to Ifemelu, an expression tacitly enunciating: I (the other woman) find it sensible to surrender sex to man, why not you (Ifemelu)!

In order to demonstrate how the foregoing accounts for Ifemelu's subjection as a woman in America (and thus a turning point in her gender engagement, seminal in what she remits) it will be recalled here

that for Foucault disciplinary practices of subjection target the body as the site inhabited by the subject (*Discipline and Punish* 136). Considering that Ifemelu, already deprived of physical signifiers of her identity (that is physicality of home), which in her own words she refers to as “familiar landmarks that made her who she was” (*Americanah* 112) and considering American world is yet unfamiliar to her, she is at a vulnerable liminal moment in terms of self-identification. This liminal unease in self-identification is already evident, before this encounter with the tennis coach, in her relation with her American roommates, Elena, Allison and Jackie. In this relation, examined above in tracing the movement towards liminal conjuncture, there lurks in horizon a threat of inferiority, as she reads in their body language a reflection of this inferiority. When for example she tells Elena that her (Ifemelu’s) boyfriend back in Nigeria loves dogs, the latter sees reflected in Elena’s response a similar pattern she had earlier seen in Jackie and Allison after revealing she had “never gone bowling,” even beginning to perceive aspects of her identity and worldview as pathological symptoms (*Americanah* 128-29). A similar vulnerability in her liminal location emerges in her encounter with Cristina Tomas on matriculation at the colleges she attends. Cristina Tomas draws out her pronunciations while conducting her through registration procedures, an act that unnerves Ifemelu. Out of this encounter, which is here seized upon as exemplary result of disciplinary import of a prevailing gaze on her subject status liminally located, she embarks on modifying her linguistic identity: “And in the following weeks ... she began to practise an American accent” (*Americanah* 134). Seen against the backdrop of vulnerability, Ifemelu’s instinctive reaction to learn the American accent makes sense as a quest to camouflage her vulnerability through assimilating American’s language practices.

Most important in this focus on relation between Ifemelu and the coach does not so much lie in liminal nature of the interpersonal contact as in the identity corollary of sexual act within Ifemelu’s own self. The sexual engagements “traumatize”,<sup>43</sup> to use Bhabha’s imagery, the plenitude of her sense of self already laid bare in spatio-temporal disjuncture. This is traceable from the point she resolves to take up tennis coach’s offer of “work” (*Americanah* 153). Right from the moment she comes to this resolution, focalized as Category B Reflector (Negative) mode, which while conveying her uncertainty about the nature of the work she was up to, is consistent with undividedness of self, a self which is capable of “looking her best” (*Americanah* 153). There is an intimation of taintless, unitary self in this looking one’s

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<sup>43</sup>While vouching for culturally (re)constructive and productive enunciative present, Bhabha avers that such enunciatory acts in the present “traumatize traditions” prompting the necessity of reshaping the traditions (Bhabha 179).

best, an identity guaranteed and hedged in by understood “boundaries she would not cross” (*Americanah* 153), a further allusion to traces of moral checks and balances embodied as a young Nigerian woman (in other words the Lacanian symbolic order). However, in the aftermath of offering her sexuality in exchange of rent money, an unretractable cleavage plunges into her awareness of self, establishing on one hand the abject and on the other a scandal-averse self, a precipitated superego. Even prior to this momentous split, there is a palpable incipience of the splitting in her focalization of power relations inherent in their psychic intersubjectivity: “She should leave now. The power balance was tilted in his favour, had tilted in his favour since she walked into his house. She should leave. She stood up” (*Americanah* 153). This transition in focalization from the preceding Category B Reflector (Negative) mode by which we have access to Ifemelu’s train of thought in touch with the wholeness of her self as she makes her way to the coach’s house, to Category B Narratorial (Positive) mode (“she should leave” reflects a part of her manoeuvring away from her ego, a detaching of narrating voice into omniscience, positioning itself not only as an observer but also assuming the role of spelling out what action is desirable at that moment (the *desirable, correct* decision is to leave). Literally, as she admits, she surrenders her power position as a self, becoming self-for-other, an object for gratification of pleasure of the man, a victory for androcentric power, for despite the vacillation she nonetheless avails herself to the tennis coach. Consequently, having surrendered her power (in surrendering sexual act against the will of a part of herself), she bares her own universe of embodied morality (a structure of boundaries) that dictates how “far” is far in sexual relations for it to remain “comfortable” (*Americanah* 153). Here it is becoming clear how the body becomes a site of ideology and therefore of power, for it dictates how certain parts of the body may be appropriated, in which otherwise appropriation marks the dissolution of order and thus dissolution of self-identity. For example, Ifemelu in this context would not find it guilty if she urinated on the tennis coach: “She could certainly do that, urinate on a man for a hundred dollars. The thought amused her, and she smiled a wry smile” (*Americanah* 153). Though urination involves using her vulva it elicits amusement rather than guilt. But she is racked by guilt when the same vulva is used in an act that evidently goes “too far”, according to her embodied values connoted by boundaries and the deictic indications (entailed in “going too far”) invoking the embodied values as the relative point of moral judgement (*Americanah* 154)). Žižek, while locating the body in the symbolic order conceptualised as ideological matrix, conceives of the body as the sublime object of ideology, “the indestructible 'body-within-the-body' exempted from the effects of wear and tear is always sustained by

the guarantee of some symbolic authority” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 13). The sublime body is thus contrasted with the material body, corresponding to the ideological value embodied in that mortal material body. Having thus permitted herself to transgress the boundaries she identifies with, the “body-within-body” of herself is confronted as a direct outcome of her surrender of power understood as that which this body-within-body affords her self to sustain itself (body-within-body). Here, then lies the disruption of a part of her identity and an emergence of a radical subject as that which “fundamentally challenge the dominant social formation” (Blunden 418).

The split plays out in the shift to introspective focalization of an ego that uncannily looms from the liminal space produced by the cleavage within self, now split into Self (which Kristeva names superego) and Other (named by Kristeva as abject) (*Powers of Horror* 2), inseparably entwined in a relation that Self “*ceaselessly confront that otherness*[within discourse], *a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate*” (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 6 emphasis mine). On the train back to her apartment, a sense of emptiness (emptied of what identifies her and thus of identity) seizes her amid an emergence of the Self: “The world was a big, big place and she was so tiny, so insignificant, rattling around emptily” (*Americanah* 154). This dissolution of identity literalizes itself in her undressing and sitting naked on her bed, and in this liminal moment, meaninglessness is all around her: “She sat on her bed and looked at her life, in this tiny room with mouldy carpet, the hundred dollar bill on the table, her body rising with loathing” (*Americanah* 154). This is a profoundly harrowing moment for Ifemelu, a fact that indicates the crippling adversity migrants are exposed to in their first attempt to establish survival mechanisms. As outlined in chapter two as facilitative of transnational mobility, tragedy of coming to suicidal end is averted for Ifemelu as Ginika (having broken even in terms of adaptation to America) opportunely comes calling with support. It is through Ginika’s own social capital that Ifemelu, then on a drift towards suicidal thought, secures employment as baby-sitter. Social remittance relevance of this experience is not immediately clear at this point but in subsequent section where significance of liminality at the level of memorialising present is presented, this turning point will be revisited in demonstrating its significance in subject formation and thus its social remittance value.

Ifemelu’s second of the maiden and pivotal brush with material realities of America is at the Turners. It is instructive that the traumatic sexual encounter with the coach occurs contiguously with this second one and thus, by her own admission, a “traumatic mark” (Bhabha’s imagery for inerasability of memory)

is already imprinted in her memory (*Americanah* 154). By this fact she is henceforth more hardened in stance against other material eventualities, an attitude that characterises the rest of her relations in different contexts while in America. But this stance cannot be attributed to this traumatic event alone. Though it may indeed be seminal in the emergence of this attitude, in the context of this study, given that the narrative does not provide direct causal link, it will be an exercise in conjecture to ascribe it the status of sole determining force. It will also be recalled at this point that a migrant's social adaptation is also dependent on a range of other resources that they acquire in the course of living through the alien social materialities. A crucial resource in this context that further sheds light as pertains the source of this hardened stance is energy resources in the form of knowledge about America's racial history that Ifemelu garners through avid reading of crucial texts that edify her on "America's mythologies" (*Americanah* 135-36). However, this is not to dismiss altogether the value of traumatic sexual encounter in shaping her stance against racial prejudice. As already indicated above, it carries a discursive value that will be exploited in outlining emergent radical subject status at the threshold of memorialising present, taking the entire narrative of *Americanah* as erratic memory's present attempt at grasping a founding experience (Bugeja, 'Reincorporative Trajectories' 11-13; Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 6, 16, 19, 23). Emergent radical subject is, so to speak, an overdetermined effect of processes of racial and sex identification. As contributory to sex identification (to be explored below), the encounter with tennis coach certainly works as a vector in the matrix of racial identification but this will not be pursued for the reason already stated above (that the narrative does not establish a direct and determinate link between racial identification and the traumatising sexual encounter with the tennis coach).

Racial identification as a process in production of agency first takes shape in Ifemelu's brazen spur with Laura. To conceptualize how this identification takes place, a detailing of constructed image of non-American others, representative of which is adumbrated in Laura's verbal expression, and which the latter expects a confirmation and conformation in Ifemelu, is necessary. In chapter two it was shown that the presence of Ifemelu's black body and the impoverished images of Indians serve to illuminate whiteness and the privilege differentially due to it. At that point the aim was to reveal material forces attending Ifemelu's arrival in America eliciting an unsettling experience. Here, though, rather than simply consider the oppressive forces at play on her arrival as totalizing her experience, even surmounting her self-determination, undertaken is an exercise to show that "agency requires a

grounding [within these oppressive forces], but it does not require a totalization of those grounds; it requires movement and manoeuvre” (Bhabha 185). Unlike the instance where she is forced into an instinctive camouflaging move to adopt American accent after encounter with Cristina Thomas, in her encounter with Laura, Ifemelu’s reaction works in an opposite manner that upset America’s constructed image of their Others.

The first intimation of pre-conceived signifieds of Nigeria and Nigerians, of which Ifemelu appears on the scene as representative, starkly stands out from Laura’s constant hijacking of Kimberly’s conversation with Ifemelu. When from the very outset Laura “nodded knowingly” concerning incessant university lecturer’s strikes in Nigeria, this is a gesture at a stabilized configuration of Nigeria, a defining aspect of which is horror: “Horrible, what’s going on in African countries” (*Americanah* 147). Ifemelu synecdochically means what Laura understands as a foregone knowledge. She emerges true to type. By this confirmation and conformation, a consistency guaranteeing the stability of her own (Laura’s) whiteness is here reproduced before her. This assertion can be corroborated with what has already become clear of Ifemelu’s sense of disorientation in identification upon arrival in Brooklyn, recalling her admission that without “the familiar landmarks that made her who she was” “there was a stripped-down quality to life, a kindling starkness” (*Americanah* 111). If presence of parents, friends, home and familiar landmarks provide signposts for her identification, her presence as Nigerian and therefore necessarily destitute, serves as equivalent familiar other that assures Laura’s own identity. Delight attend her uninterrupted authorization process manifest in nodding knowingly and laughing with palpable relief at perceiving poverty, supposedly self-proclaimed by Ifemelu in what, ironically, is intended by the latter as subtle affront to “American ego” (*Americanah* 147). Further solidifying the authority of the image, relegation of Ifemelu to third person during this interaction, conveys an absence of her materiality and a presence as authorized: “Kim, if *she* was eating all this wonderful organic food in Nigeria, why would *she* come to the US?” Ifemelu’s materiality is erased in Laura’s directing her speech to Kimberly. In the utterance, the subject of the statement is affirmed whereas the subject of enunciation is denounced. Affirmed, by negating resolution of contradictory implication of access to redeeming “organic food”, is what is understood (the necessarily poor, the necessarily horrible). Denounced is the threatening materiality that, by its own proclamation, has access to redeeming organic food. Arguably, therefore, to be American is to have a destitute other, a binary opposition that sustains Laura’s stability of self-identity.

Even in the face of depersonalizing authorizations salient in Laura's look, it will be recalled here that Ifemelu is already characterized as "a fine babe but she is too much trouble. She can argue. She can talk. She never agrees" (*Americanah* 60). She is known as such even before the idea leaving Nigeria for US takes shape. Defining moments in her life in Nigeria are set apart by spontaneity of reaction. There is the sheer firmness in standing for reason when Aunt Uju, having painstakingly prepared for the coming of The General, directs her aggression on her housemaid when The General defers his homecoming at the last minute. The choice to stand for reason chafes on Aunt Uju's fury who slaps Ifemelu but after reconciling, relations between them alter and henceforth "for the first time, Ifemelu felt older than Aunt Uju, wiser and stronger than Aunt Uju" a fact the narrative carries through as will be considered in the next section. Then there is the sacrilegious disobedience against the orders of revered Sister Ibinabo, an act that astonishes many:

Ifemelu folded her arms, and *as often happened when she was about to say something she knew was better unsaid*, the words rushed up her throat. "Why should I make decorations for a thief?"

Sister Ibinabo stared in astonishment. A silence fell. The other girls looked on expectantly. (*Americanah* 51)

In school she is "known for insubordination, which together with her impetuous reaction to Sister Ibinabo, in the eyes of her father cements "her natural proclivity towards provocation" (*Americanah* 52). Precipitate resolution to accept tennis coach's offer paves way for indelible memory inscription with far-reaching implication as will be shown subsequently. In "The Thing Around Your Neck" the headlong plunge into the unknown propitiously opens an opportunity for establishing own space for engagement. From these examples, it is suffice to contend that Adichie uses impetuosity as a device to introduce a crucial discontinuity in a character's state of affairs, often fortuitously changing the course of events or worldview. This equally applies to Laura's harrying racial and xenophobic put-downs. In a reckless move that radically reconfigures the character of the relations, from the place of the authorized figure unexpectedly utters itself the denounced subject. At first its voice surprises:

... Kimberly said. Oh, look at this beautiful woman," and pointed at a plain model in a magazine whose only distinguishing feature was her dark skin. "Isn't she just stunning?"

"No, she isn't." Ifemelu paused. "You know you can just say 'black'. Not every black person is beautiful."

Kimberly was taken aback, something wordless spread on her face.... (181)



This bold engagement unsettles the core of the constructed exotic other and by extension the gaze that authorize it. The authority of whiteness to stipulate beauty is called into question in the renunciation of the blanket standards of beauty for blacks. A more profoundly destabilising repudiation comes against the veiled questions of American racial history and Africa's post-independence democratic practice embraced at the very moment as signifier of progress. Laura's pathologizing of blacks' lived effects of racism turns on itself, revealing entrenched pathologies of her own identification that locates progress in America and backwardness in places and peoples constructed as other. In addition to the deviant articulateness of the figure spoken for, so to speak, the other speaks progress while she (Laura) speaks that of backwardness:

"In graduate school I knew a woman from Africa who was just like the doctor, I think she was from Uganda. She was wonderful, and she didn't get along with the African American woman in our class at all. She didn't have all those issues."

"Maybe when the African American's father was not allowed to vote [by the whites] because hers was black, the Ugandan's father was running for parliament or studying at Oxford," Ifemelu said.

*Laura stared at her, made a mocking confused face. "Wait, did I miss something?"*

"I think it's a simplistic comparison to make. *You need to understand a bit more history,*" Ifemelu said.

*Laura's lips sagged. She staggered, collected herself.*

"Well. I'll get my daughter and then go find some history books from the library, if I can figure out what they look like!" Laura said and matched out. (*Americanah* 168)

In the slippage of progress as signifier of whiteness, and thus of America, and its confounding with signified otherness hitherto imaged as backward, Laura's binaries collapse signalling entry into own liminality or as Bhabha would put it, an emergence of "crisis of authority" (101). As for Ifemelu, this marks the moment of her emergence as an agent. As "the depersonalised, dislocated [othered] subject [Ifemelu] ... becomes[s] an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place. The demand of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subject" (Bhabha 62). Ifemelu as a subject earlier spoken for eludes and elides the placement, instead seizing upon Laura's *idée fixe* (Bhabha 101) and subversively deploying them in destabilising authority of invisible whiteness. The shocking progress of the black man, the glaring ignorance of white authority represented by Laura's (though sarcastic) undertaking to "go find some history books from the library, if she can figure out what they look like" (*Americanah* 168) reveal themselves from Ifemelu's in-between location. In this location lies "a tension of meaning and

being” resulting from occupying both polarities, where “a strategy of subversion emerges” (Bhabha 62). Bhabha’s term for one of these strategies is sly civility (the incalculable but calculative), that permeates Ifemelu’s wry posts in her blog, *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by Non-American Black*.

In what attests to enduring significance of spatio-temporal liminality despite extended stay and achievement in the host society (hence the likelihood of assimilation), even the closural moment in *Americanah* as marked by a melancholic drift towards Nigerian homeland is heavily animated by the uncanny. At Mariama’s salon, the figure of the African cast against American socio-economic landscape, specifically at its margins, glaringly concretize within Ifemelu’s view.<sup>44</sup> Unlike the cases of liminal moments examined above, Ifemelu’s uncanny encounter with the African figure in the salon does more to corroborate an already operational calculative agent status than it indicates the emergence of this status. Notably, the hair braiding salons are clustered in an enclave of African immigrants largely insulated from the demands of living under white hegemony as illustrated in the story of Ifemelu’s struggle for a place in this white dominated American world. In this enclave virtually everything construed African is kept pristine including fixation to a staple of Nigerian films, inclination to ethnic identity and national stereotype, essentially a transposition to America of African business acumen or lack of it, the African woman’s proclivity to marriage as the ultimate career, the hounding monetary demands from non-migrant relatives in Africa and an unqueried assumptions about America vis-à-vis African world. It is this unaltered character that render them quaint from the in-between focal place filled in by Ifemelu as already explored above. From Ifemelu’s focal place, this quaintness is attended by a repugnance metaphorically transposed into a repulsive disease and disability. Ailment and socio-cultural atavism are narratively coupled as to leave no doubt about the focalising agent’s esteem in relation to atavistic desires of the insular community of African immigrants. Strongly revealing this repugnance is the figure of the young Senegalese woman, Aisha, trapped in America as an undocumented immigrant and desperately scheming to have one of two Nigerian immigrant men she is dating to marry her. From the very outset, she manifests “something strange about her” (*Americanah*

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<sup>44</sup>In the narrative it is reported that the location of salon was “in the part of the city that had graffiti, dank buildings and no white people” (*Americanah* 9).

10). We are forewarned of this something strange through narrative submission of her figure to a disturbingly infective skin condition afflicting her:

“I think you Yoruba because you dark and Igbo fair. I have two Igbo men. Very good. Igbo men take care of women real good.”

Aisha was almost whispering, a sexual suggestion in her tone, *and in the mirror, the discoloration on her arms and neck became ghastly sores*. Ifemelu imagined some bursting and oozing, others flaking. She looked away.

“Igbo men take care of women real good,” Aisha repeated. “I want marry. They love me but they say the family want Igbo woman. Because Igbo marry Igbo always.” (*Americanah* 14-15 emphasis mine)

In a subsequent analeptic shift the absurdity of Igbo men being caring is turned up in the ironic figure of Bartholomew, an Igbo, who not only lives off Uju’s income but has also brought a sense of misery to her life. Bartholomew has Uju’s salary, forbids her monetary remittance to her kin, and is apathetic to her son. Preposterousness of Africa’s ethnic stereotyping is laid bare in Aisha’s patent error about Ifemelu’s ethnic identity. Whereas the Igbo is generalised as fair-skinned, Ifemelu’s skin turns up darker-toned, an incongruence that does not seem to bother Aisha. In the sentence “Aisha was almost whispering, a sexual suggestion in her tone, and in the mirror, the discoloration on her arms and neck became ghastly sores” there is established a relation of animation between conservative outlook and Aisha’s skin condition. The more obviously her conservatism present to Ifemelu, the graver the skin ailment become animated. From the hyperbolic terms in which the skin condition (“ghastly sores”) is seen we are afforded a grasp of Ifemelu’s driving desire to re-construct the ways of seeing within African social world. Opposed to this acuity that is realized in her is Aisha’s blindness to other liberating ways of seeing. Rationally, a ghastly sore would ordinarily occasion a physical indisposition but in Aisha’s case this physicality of the sore is converted into a symbolism of an incapacitating embodied symbolic order, a reification of a sore invisible to her because of her narrow-mindedness. In literally not seeing her ghastly sores, she does not metaphorically realize the unaltered imprisoning ways of seeing that traps her in misery of immigrant parochialism. Even if she acknowledges the existence of the sores, she is indifferent to this existence and thus apathetic about its treatment, a fact that clearly shows in her response to Ifemelu’s enquiry about how the skin condition occurred: ‘Aisha shrugged. “I don’t know. It just come and after it go”’ (*Americanah* 364). This parallels apathy that draws from African immigrants’ conservatism.

As the narrative progresses the oddity of which the appalling skin condition as a metaphoric stand-in gradually surfaces, climaxing in disconsolate appeal to Ifemelu to persuade one of the men to have her as his wife, ethnicity notwithstanding, and thus grant her legal immigrant status (*Americanah* 18, 364). Foregrounded and critiqued through her figure is Africa's problem of ethnic stereotyping and African woman's self-confinement to marriage as *the* career and a necessary means to an end even where the man does not evince a commitment to settling down in marriage, key ingredients of Nigeria's civic structure and class formation that Ifemelu is to embark on destabilising upon returning to Nigeria and which will be comprehended as social remittance in the next chapter.<sup>45</sup> The agentic desire is here implicit in presentation of the quaint African immigrant in need of a redemptive re-adaptation of ways of seeing understood by Levitt as normative structures. The agentic stance suggested here is strategic adaptiveness rather than insular conservatism. From the focal place of Ifemelu as an interrogative agent, normative structures and systems of practice isolated as African remnants and which are transposed unaltered to American world, are presented as morbid tendencies from which one must not only mature, but ideas and values of which one at a catachrestic position as Ifemelu must work to re-vision (Bugeja, 'Reincorporative Trajectories' 15). If the immigrants are projected as metaphorically diseased because of conservatism, then the focalising agent suggests that there is a possibility of metaphorically remedying the ailment through social engagement as remittance of what Levitt terms normative structures and systems of practice ('Social Remittances' 927; *The Transnational Villagers* 57–63). Ifemelu's focal stance highlights not only a frowning at fixation with *the* African way of doing things, but it also evinces a desire to disrupt this rigidity.

### **Emergence of the meddler/middler as calculative and interrogative agent**

While productive in-between explored above foreground interpersonal and by extension inter-racial relations, this section draws attention to operations within memory as confronted by and as it confronts worlds and interrelations marked by disorienting difference. Ifemelu's migration experience is to be seen here as founding experience producing disjunctive working of memory. This act of memorialising, like the empowering interrelations examined above, is an epistemological process of mustering and mastering position of engagement, negotiation and interrogation even though this same process may on the surface present as collusive with oppressive forces encountered in the causes and

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<sup>45</sup>This will be subject of next chapter as focus shifts to encompass *HYS*.

courses of migration (Bugeja, 'Reincorporative Trajectories' 11). The activity of mustering occurs through narrative presentation of "furtive but nonetheless ideologically *incisive* - perhaps even *insidious* – agendas" (Bugeja, 'Reincorporative Trajectories' 11). First, how can it be resolved that Ifemelu engages in promiscuous sexual act in America yet paradoxically project pitiable figures of promiscuous women, or better still suffer the trauma of offering sex that would generate monetary benefit for herself? Secondly, how can one resolve the figure of the contemptuous Nigerian taxi operator in America postulated by Ifemelu, as against her own phantasmal image of America and against the irredeemably corrupt Nigeria's body politic? Since this project pursues questions pertinent to focalization, these problems can be denominated thus: how can we reconcile these incongruous ways of seeing despite emanating from one central consciousness? These questions can be adequately addressed through the optic of Bugeja's memorial-historical dialectic in which it will be demonstrated that the dialogic relations between these apparently contradictory elements represent agency "constituted in the subject's return ... in the dialogic position of *calculation, negotiation, interrogation...*" (Bhabha 186 emphasis mine).

Before embarking on addressing these questions, it is essential to justify the functioning of memory with a view to determining its applicability to conceiving narrative act in *Americanah* as essentially a disjunctive memorialising act in the liminal present. This approach to memory as narrative, what Nicolas Szilas has termed "narrative hypothesis"(134)has engaged a number of scholars of cognition who seek to account for narratives in all its manifestation including literary narratives. This has, for example, made Ronald B. Richardson to declare in the title of his essay on memory and narrative: "[m]emory is [n]arrative; [n]arrative is [m]emory" (pt.title).Among these scholars there is a concurrence that there is immanent narrativity in human experience. Roger C. Schankel and Robert P. Abelson, David Herman as well as Jerome Bruner contend that "narrative is not just an activity or a sophisticated form of communication, but a concrete underlying topology of memory" or "a way of reasoning on experience" (cited in León 19) thus enabling the contention that narrative artefact (what León terms "narrative object" (21)) as *Americanah* is an architecture of memory of the interrogative and calculative personage through whose consciousness the narrative world is memorialised. For Bruner, experience and memory of events are necessarily structured into a kind of narrative (4). León offers terms by which we can analyse literary narratives as narrative memory. As a step towards delineating these terms he defines narrative object as "any cognitive object stored in the narrative

memory, therefor [sic] having narrative properties” (21). The properties in question are kernels (“the most salient part, main objective or conflict”), satellites (“those constituents of a narrative object that are not central to the narrative itself, but are connected to the kernel and needed or useful for a variety of reasons, namely causation, contextualization, explanation of the effects”) and relations between the kernel and its satellites (21). The latter is realized through factors of time (chronology), principle of cause-and-effect, agency and objects (objects, character and characterization), setting and context, composition (a deliberateness in configuration of kernels and satellites) and abstraction (the familial relations between kernels and satellites) (23-24).

Positing that the narrative act is ultimately the working memory begs the questions: whose memory processes are these which are threaded into the narrative in *Americanah*? In other words whose consciousness is it that which arrays or configures the other ways of seeing examined above (androcentric gaze, patriarchal gaze, phantasm, invisible whiteness), playing one against the other, hence constituting focalization *mise en abyme* (a focalization within a focalization)? Pertinent to this question, Uspensky rightly contemplates a determining focal angle that configures the other focal stances in the narrative, that is a focal angle that will “subordinate all others” in the narrative:

... if some other point of view should emerge, nonconcurrent with the dominant one (if, for example, some facts should be judged from the point of view of one of the characters), this judgement will in turn be reevaluated from the more dominant position, and the evaluating *subject* (the character), together with his system of ideas, will become the *object*, evaluated from the more general viewpoint. (8-9)

To determine the answer to the question posed above, relative to the factors of establishing relations between kernels and satellites in *Americanah*, the memorialising consciousness in *Americanah* betray memory’s erratic and sporadic tendency, in the midst of living through the present moment of fractured experience emanating from the event of crossing and living astraddle national and continental borders, and which present in the form of threshold consciousness (Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 19). The narrative in *Americanah* is marked by analeptic and proleptic movements, temporal shifts that highlight “capriciousness” of an active memory (Bugeja, ‘Reincorporative Trajectories’ 12). As Ifemelu is preparing to return to Nigeria, the point in the novel that marks its closure (*Americanah* 3-18, 39-40), expository memory drifts into beginnings, triggered by the present act of hair plaiting that summon up satellite narratives of her mother’s fraught religion vis-à-vis her luxuriant hair, the mother’s religious impetuosity, religious intemperance of Sister

Ibinabo, Auntie Uju's sexual appendage to The General, and a representation of narrative kernel of Ifemelu's beginnings and development of romantic relationship with Obinze (*Americanah* 41-101). As if in constant need to awaken from a memorial reverie to the present temporality, the narrative sharply switches persistently to the pressing present preparation for a return migration to Nigeria (*Americanah* 102-03, 186-91), even as it intermittently relapses to a past of trauma and a past of identity plenitude (*Americanah* 103-84), a dialogic memorial activity whose significance shall be explored shortly. Even in many instances of analeptic retroversion, there inhere indications of a liminal afterwardness of memory's working to grasp the unsettling and perplexing experience of transnational location (Lacan 684; Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 104-05; Bhabha 185; Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 27). For example, it is only after encounter with her American roommates, particularly in their bathing mannerisms, that a memory of her being bathed by her mother is recouped but suddenly taking on a new significance:

People who did not scrub in the shower; their shampoos and conditioners and gels were cluttered in the bathroom, but there was not a single sponge, and this, the absence of a sponge, made them seem unreachably alien to her. (One of her earliest memories was of her mother, a bucket of water between them in the bathroom, saying to her, “*Ngwa*, scrub between your legs very well, very well ...,” and Ifemelu had applied a little too much vigour with the loofah, to show her mother just how clean she could get herself, and for a few days afterwards had hobbled around with her leg spread wide.) (135)

As a result of dialogic relations between these acts of bathing, each render the other ludicrous, as bathing demands of her mother is revealed in the memorialising present for its excess, in turn rendering deficient the roommates' presently observed hygiene practice. This constitutes Bugeja's thesis in his hypothesis of memorial-historical liminality. Constant temporal shifts, rather than pointing to a pliant living through experience, betray an interrogative and calculative dialogic interplay of experiences in which, as Bugeja insists, the past is recalled “in the process of analysing the present, and a narration of the present through a process of re-valuing the past” (*Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 19). As an afterwards memorialising emerging from transnational location, therefore, the narrative in *Americanah* “is capable of exploiting and interpreting, grounding and decontextualizing, concealing or foregrounding, and essentializing or trivializing” texts of authority (androcentrism, patriarchy, racism) separately structuring the American world and Nigerian world (Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East* 27). Bhabha's and Bugeja's conceptualization of calculativeness, sly civility or furtive



ideological agendas within the discourses of authority is salutary is answering the questions posed above.<sup>46</sup>

In effect the task here is a deliberation on the question that lurks for the radical subject from the place that Bhabha identifies, through Lacan and Žižek, as the third locus (the space opened in the production of radical subjectivity at the beyond or at the margins of the signification order): “You are telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at?” (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 112, 123-24; Lacan 690; Bhabha 184; for illustrative examples see also Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* 18). Illustratively, this can be understood in relation to memorial activity in *Americanah* as the glaring gap or difference between what is actually brought to our view in the narrative act which Žižek elucidates with the term locution as the linguistic data (such as phantasm, sexual trauma, blogging, to name but a few) and the effect or “illocutionary force” of that which is brought to view in the narrative structure (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 124; *How to Read Lacan* 18). In other words in the narrative as an act of memory, phantasmal imagination, sexual trauma, sex, concubinage, and blogging enter into “a dialectics in which it aims at something other than its literal meaning” (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 125). So in this section we ask, as with Žižek, at the level of narrative utterance the focalizer is referring to *this* (phantasm, sexual trauma, sex, concubinage, blogging), but what does she actually want to tell us with it, through it? (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 123–24), and then proceeding to synthesize the dialogic or illocutionary implication of these narrative utterances.

First, to see the ubiquitous image of the precarious woman sponsored to maintain an elevated class distinction, is to draw from a memory in which traumatic sexual encounter is hauntingly etched and sublated into the matrix of what Stiles terms community of psychic voices resulting from assimilation of problematic experience (462, 463). Such traumatic imprint engenders the Lacanian desire as the agentic interrogative impetus that, as Kristeva reminds us, will perpetually strive to make the discourse legitimising objectification of women untenable (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 6).<sup>47</sup> Such discourses

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<sup>46</sup>Namely, how can it be resolved that Ifemelu engages in promiscuous sexual act in America yet paradoxically project pitiable figures of promiscuous women? Secondly, how can one resolve the figure of the contemptuous Nigerian in America postulated by Ifemelu, as against her own phantasmal image of America and against the irredeemably corrupt, (and, it should be added, alienated) Nigeria’s body politic?

<sup>47</sup>Henceforth Lacanian desire will be interchangeably used with the phrase political desire as Bhabha decouples it from its psychoanalytic grounding and deployment in articulation of a politics of resistance and engagement in the society. This will distinguish the usage of the word desire from other instances where the word desire is used as synonymous with aspiration or wish.

brought to question in *Americanah* and *HYS* is Nigeria's class formation and patriarchal order. Androcentrically appropriated sex in America is seen as translated into processes of class formation and patriarchal order in Nigeria. This process of transposition entails an accompanying furtive transposition of traumatic content that then becomes the tool for critiquing the sex basis of class and patriarchal formation in Nigeria to be explored in the next chapter. As is implicit from this dialogic calculation, identity-bestowing sex degrades both man and woman. Sex-for-rent in America, with all the psychological damage it brings, foregrounds the trauma concealed in the hard-boiled postures of Adesuwa, Uche, Ranyinudo and Auntie Uju which can be understood here as the Freudian reaction formation. Paradoxically, our view of normative sex-for-class in the patriarchal order, putatively empowering a woman, is disturbed in its dialogic relation with the parallel sex-for-rent which carries trauma baggage. Its normativity, especially its "rationality and logic" of endowment, is rendered uncertain (Bennett and Royle 35). On one hand it is revealed for its dehumanizing force, vis-à-vis a woman while on the other it reduces man to an abominable and monstrous being, unambiguously captured in the figure of The General and the tennis coach. Normativity of sex in class formation and patriarchal order is thus revealed for its being insidious in the discursive matrix of patriarchy relegating women to object status.

But dialogue between the presentation of these different sexual relations does not lead to an essentialisation of sex as necessarily a tool for patriarchal domination, *per se*, nor is it presented with rigid moralism that would legitimize Sister Ibinabo's aversion to explicit sexuality:

"I saw you wearing tight trousers last Saturday," Sister Ibinabo said to a girl, Christie, in an exaggerated whisper but high enough for everyone to hear "Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial. *Any girl that wears tight trousers wants to commit the sin of temptation. It is best to avoid it*" (*Americanah* 51)

On the contrary, a place for sex and sexuality as enunciatory channels for disarticulating androcentric and patriarchal strictures and structures is mooted. From Sister Ibinabo's interdictions on woman's sexuality is projected a view of woman as intrinsically guilty of sexual perversion beguiling the putatively innocent men through sex appeal. In this view it goes without saying that man's sexual innocence is presumed and as such it is the woman who must of necessity be constrained to preserve her body *for* man who would take from this body extinguished of any sexual need what he needs. This proprietary masculine view of woman's body is unequivocally expressed in The General's sense of entitlement to

Aunty Uju's sexual being in the 'way he reached out to slap Aunty Uju's backside as they went upstairs, saying, "All this for me? All this for me?"' (*Americanah* 79–80). As already argued in relation to Ifemelu's sexual encounter with tennis coach, woman's body and inert objects and substances exist in terms of relations of fungibility in effect constituting patriarchal sexual subjugation of woman that as it has been demonstrated above etches a traumatic inscription in Ifemelu's memory. This inscription, as Bhabha reminds us(179), produces the Lacanian desire that is to take shape in a politics of sex and sexuality that she is to set herself to. Ifemelu's memorial groping into past sex relations between her aunt and The General, Sister Ibinabo's prohibitions on sexuality, her own harrowing sexual encounter with Admore tennis coach, her sexual discontentment with Curt, her transient sexual liaison with Rob, casts doubt on her claim of curiosity as impetus for cheating on Curt. In a dramatic turn, as if leading her to probe the essence of her sexual anomie, when Curt angrily states what he sees as *the* shared understanding of sex act between man and woman, a quasi-epiphanic revelations opens before her:

"You gave him what he wanted," Curt said. The planes of his face were hardening. It was an odd thing for Curt to say, the sort of thing Aunty Uju, who thought of sex as something a woman gave a man at a loss to herself, would say.

In a sudden giddy fit of recklessness, *she corrected* Curt. "*I took what I wanted. If I gave him anything, then it was incidental*" (*Americanah* 288)

In this extract, three sex relations are overtly brought to dialogue, Ifemelu's affair with Rob, the one now breaking up between the former and Curt, and that between Uju and the General. But from what Curt gives value as having been sexually drawn by the other man ("You gave him what he wanted"), the repressed traumatic sexual relation between her and the tennis coach, who also took what he wanted, is prefigured. From this memorial dialogue between different sexual relations it suddenly becomes retroactively clear as to what sex means: that it is always an act in which man takes what he wants and woman merely offers what is wanted by man, herself drawing nothing from it, remaining inert. Ifemelu's "sudden giddy fit of recklessness" seen as a spontaneous affront on Curt's androcentric understanding of sexual intercourse, marks the critical moment of enunciating her sexual identity, discovering epiphanically she is in control. To utter "I took what I wanted. If I gave him anything, then it was incidental" is to convey an altered way of seeing herself as a sexual being. Considering she admits to Curt her guilt of yielding to her sexual curiosity, and indeed exhibiting remorse for it ("It meant nothing. It happened once and I am sorry"), a *conscious* decision to inflame Curt's injury would be imprudent. It

is instructive to note that before this epiphany, she admits she had been living through a sexual anomie, a liminal momentum impelling her groping for the essential import of her sexuality:

It was true, she had cheated on Curt with a younger man who lived in her apartment building in Charles Village and played in a band. But it was also true that she had longed, with Curt, to hold emotions in her hand that she never could. *She had not entirely believed herself while with him* – happy, handsome Curt, with his ability to twist life into the shapes he wanted. She loved him, and the spirited easy life he gave her, *and yet she often fought the urge to create rough edges, to squash his sunniness, even if just a little.* (*Americanah* 287 emphasis mine)

Intuitive grasp of subjugatory function of sex is as disorienting as to engulf a sense of prudence in salvaging her romantic relation with Curt. Touched off by Curt's inadvertent sexual androcentrism, she lurches, through liminal memorial dialogic activity, into an illuminating realization of the need to recalibrate her view of sex and her sexuality. In the utterance she makes it clear that she is speaking in her capacity as a woman, without denying that man as well indeed takes what he wants, thus challenging the hegemonic androcentric view of sexuality that sex is a medium for man's power and a concomitant means for woman's disempowerment. In chapter five it will be shown how this agency thrusts Ifemelu's unsettling activism against women's sexual dependence on men for class ascendance when she returns to Nigeria.

Secondly, to the extent that *Americanah* is essentially a rendition of memorialising activity in the present, it is inadequate to pass off Ifemelu's phantasmal construction of American world as a foolhardy activity that in its presenting as mirage occasion conjuncture on her arrival in America. Though indeed phantasmal believe in flawlessness of America is presented as something that needs to be outgrown, to co-opt Bugeja's term ('Reincorporative Trajectories' 15), and has indeed been outgrown, it should not be neglected that, as it will be demonstrated shortly, phantasmal image is strategically recouped in the memorialising present for the larger purpose of critiquing the two worlds of America and Nigeria. Analeptic memorial retrieval of phantasm in the present preparation to return to Nigeria functions dialogically in relation to encountered realities in America, realities in Nigeria relegated to a geographical distance and in relation to the threshold space opened in the memorialising present as a result of transnational dislocation. It is observed from this very outset that this immaculateness attributed to the realm of America is submitted as benchmark against which to critique specific social realities in the two nations.

Delusional geographical imagination in which America is granted utopian status while tacitly ratifying inferior status of Nigeria evoke Hegelian Mastery-Servitude dialectic, where Ifemelu, therefore, in her espousing delusional affirmation of utopian America naively slips into position as for-other in its being black and African (subjectively necessarily destitute) while white American figure represented in Laura positions itself for-itself through sublation of Ifemelu's alterity (see Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, para.180). As already demonstrated earlier in the chapter, in examining the agency value of liminality at interpersonal level, this sublation manifests in Laura's relishing the former's unwitting recognition of her (and by extrapolation, America's) constructed privilege in the world order. But interest here is invested in delineating memorialising present's critical utilization of a past way of seeing America vis-à-vis Nigeria.

To trace the critical utility of phantasm, we immediately mark here that memorial analepsis to satellite narrative of phantasm is prompted within the same breath as when the figure of disdainful Nigerian taxi driver is apprehensively anticipated at Trenton taxi station (*Americanah* 8). This is the contingent moment in Ifemelu's life that, as a result of making the radical decision to return to Nigeria to start life afresh having achieved success in a world everyone who matters to her envies to live in, throws memorable past into relief. As already illustrated, it is also in this contingent moment that Mariama's salon scene uncannily comes to live with revulsive figures of conservative African immigrant. This threshold moment of poignant return to where it all started and by which it has all culminated in immeasurable success cannot but work to impellingly call up those joys and traumas, folly and discretion that have had to be involved and endured to realize this success. But most conspicuously still visible in the present moment, despite all her successes and mastery of her own utopic distortion of America and her homeland, are the follies of fellow African immigrants, and especially of Nigerians representative of which is the hypothetical Nigerian taxi driver scornful of his homeland and compatriots. Recuperation of utopic memory in the present as a retroactive bid to reveal the unwitting submission of oneself, in Hegelian terms, to subservient reinforcement of America through locating utopic realm in it while abasing Nigerian homeland. In this sense we are offered an oblique critique of Nigerians, settled in America and those back home, who like the conjectured Nigerian taxi driver, find it easy to adopt condescending attitude to their homeland, even harbouring strong desire to abandon it and emigrate to what they consider *the* destination: America. It is apt at this point to recall Bourdieu's paradoxical aphorism that act as epigraph to this chapter: "[T]he movement towards the originary,

and the ordinary, world should be the culmination of a movement towards the alien and extraordinary worlds” (*Homo academicus* xi–xii). Whereas in emigrating to the West there is a widespread perception among Nigerians that one has made it to the realm where life becomes possible, the true destination, ought to be one’s homeland, not merely as an exercise in financial and economic remittance but more so as a critical exercise of social remittance. This is clear from Ifemelu’s conscious and judicious decision to return to Nigeria despite how everyone else sees it as ill-judged:

She scoured Nigerian websites ... and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. *Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil.* (*Americanah* 6)

This way of seeing Nigeria as inalienable natal homeland in need of reciprocal nurture stands in a diametric contrast to the younger Ifemelu’s way of seeing that exclusively bestows America with patent right for empowerment. But Ifemelu now sees differently and there is an urgent necessity of returning home under the imperative of interventional fosterage. This seeing differently and committing oneself to this way of seeing in practice is here grasped as part of acquired normative structures that her return migration opens up as social remittance.

It is necessary to demonstrate how an ethic of engagement stemming from the altered way of seeing is honed in America as part of what Levitt terms systems of practice that will be pursued in the next chapter as social remittance. The key to demarcating how this ethic of engagement again reaches back to the import of utopian production of American sphere that is uncannily and metaphorically revealed in the vision of “students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease” (*Americanah* 99), a vision of America with unexpendable plenitude. In effect, by means of pre-constructed quixotic template, a benchmark against which America is to be adjudged is offered. The production of America as a utopia is not limited to geographical imagination alone, however, as Americans themselves, through the figure of Laura, in their hegemonic construction of their others, are accomplices in this utopian production. Justifiably, therefore, it should be through this same exemplar that reality of America is calculated. But in its unfolding before the eyes of the arriving Ifemelu, America continually come off as falling short of its own standards as elucidated earlier. At the point that this continual falling short materially call for an alteration of what Žižek terms the sublime object of ideology (*The*

*Sublime Object of Ideology* 12), a political desire for urgent and exigent remedial engagement is precipitated. Invisible infrastructures of racism (to borrow Carol Levine's term for discursive structures enabling and sustaining racism in *Americanah*) crops up in the demand exerted on her to see her hair as negative signifier, that is implicit in the demand for conditional re-configuration of the body as sublime object of ideology in order to access America's resources represented here as employment opportunity. From this demand as a traumatic coercion to emend the body as it is, it becomes blatantly manifest to Ifemelu that America's social discourse is an inscription of whiteness wherein blackness as its other is described and thus absented from what is crystalized as mainstream social text. This is exactly the point at which Ifemelu begins battling to not only accept the nature of her hair but to also resist white social text's hegemonic hairism, relegating the blacks' hair as a double for unprofessionalism (*Americanah* 204). As she prepares for the job interview, we stare at the imperative of complicit positioning of her body as the sublime object of hegemonic white ideology through straightening her hair, if only to present a professional figure and as conditional to getting the desperately needed job that would be significant resource in insuring her independence. As with Foucauldian hypothesis of bodily disciplining in subjection, Ifemelu has to suffer the traumatic effect of this hegemonic ideology's physical stamp through the bid to straighten her hair which goes awry. In Bhabha's terms this constitutes a symbolic, foundational trauma, a mark that engenders a political Lacanian desire to revisit and re-engage (179). Utopian image of America is thus a template by which material America is rendered as short of its putative self even as it nullifies its own utopian construct. This opens a new front of contingency where its materiality, no longer simply known, is performatively confronted (Bhabha 2). This is especially vital because as shown, in America's mainstream social discourse black is described and therefore there is a pressing necessity for performative engagement to widen the social latitude.

As it hauntingly becomes the more patent that America's social text overdermining its cosmetic industry has no place for the black race, Ifemelu becomes increasingly exasperated, the more so because her romantic partner, Curt, in his colour blindness, does not only fail to notice the erased black figure but also downplays such erasure. This spat with Curt warrants a lengthy quotation for it is revealing of subject agent's seminal mode for attacking invisible but glaring absurdity of white hegemony in its active operation:



“So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women’s magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous .... Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me .... Look, this article tells you to pinch your cheeks for colour because all their readers are supposed to have cheeks you can pinch for colour. This tells you about different hair products for *everyone* – and ‘everyone’ means blondes, brunettes and redheads. I am none of those. And this tells you about the best conditioners – for straight, wavy and curly. No kinky .... This tells you about matching your eye colour and eye shadow – blue, green and hazel eyes. But my eyes are black so I can’t know what shadow works for me. This says that this pink lipstick is universal, but they mean universal if you are white because I would look like a golliwog if I tried that shade of pink....”(Americanah 295 emphasis in the original)

More or less objective observations are presented in parallel construction, as if the magazines themselves are being spread before us so that a hidden riddle becomes perceptible behind their presentation, eliciting for us the Lacanian interrogative: “You are telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at?” (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 112, 123–24; Lacan 690; Bhabha 184). The presentation leaves what Bhabha terms critical aporia for the focal agent is not merely interested in cataloguing or identification of what the magazines say on their surfaces but is engaging in an aporetic strategy of calculation, fingering at something more than they say with this superficiality. In the words of Bhabha these terms isolated on the magazines are invested with something that exceeds the frames of these terms and which:

... eludes the eye, ... leaves a resistant trace ... a sign of resistance. We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being [of these terms] but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics. (49-50)

The turning point where discovery of pervasiveness of Lacanian lack of the utopic place for her as a black woman within America’s social matrix, marks the point of inception of a political desire to destabilise “the invisible [perceptual] infrastructures .... [t]o unsettle the privileged obliviousness” by which racism is insidiously sustained in America (Levine, “‘The Strange Familiar’: Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie’s *Americanah*’ 588). This political desire fortuitously finds expression in blogging that, incidentally, is at that juncture an emergent phenomenon. Resort to blogging does not, however, begin as a conscious bid to disrupt the racial *status quo* but as an exercise in curiosity, whether there existed online communities of blacks impinged upon by insidious operation of racism (*Americanah* 296). Ultimately she finds agentic footing in this discursive space opened over the internet where the political project of defamiliarizing systemic racism transpires in aporetic and oblique blog posts, a calculative agentic manoeuvre characterised by Bhabha as sly civility. The memorial activity in

*Americanah* is interspersed with vignettes of these posts precisely at points in this memorialising that strategically open critical aporias intended to “estrangle our routine of ignoring routine” of racism. All except one of the blog posts reproduced in the narrative are presented in a manner that there is a calculated gap, mostly presented as a sly question, each gesturing mockingly at a particular racial absurdity, or starkly calculated to cause maximum damage to the pervasive American posture of social correctness (see *Americanah* 184-85, 205, 213-14, 220-21, 296-98, 302, 306-07, 315, 321, 329, 330-31, 337-38, 346, 350-51, 361-62).<sup>48</sup> Sly civility lies in the calculative tenor of her blog posts, she remains incalculably masked behind the discursive anonymity of the internet:

Yet a part of her always stiffened with apprehension, expecting the person on the other end to realize that she was play-acting this professional, this negotiator of terms, to see that she was, in fact, an unemployed person who wore rumpled nightshirt all day, to call her “Fraud!” and hang up. (*Americanah* 304)

But she is all too aware of the protective screen of internet’s discursivity insuring her from the offended and vengeful Americans conjectured as “judgemental angry mob waiting for her, biding their time until they could attack her, unmask her” (*Americanah* 307). Even as this virtual shield is obvious, it should also be remembered that this subversive sly agent is unwittingly protected by its victim’s (America’s) constitutional ecology renowned for its aggressive guaranteeing of right to privacy and right to free speech and anonymity in the cyberspace, popularly labelled as “right to be let alone” (see Heins 65-67).

It should also be remembered at this point that attainment of agentic interrogativeness and sly civility as tools for political intervention are not spontaneously realized within an empty slate of a settling immigrant. As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Ifemelu arrives in America with ripe potentialities that enter into dialectic weaving with socio-political forces existent in the host American society.

## Conclusion

This chapter aimed at tracing focalizing agents’ development as immigrants through the processes of mastering and mustering their immigrant precarity and how they deploy the attained mastery in a

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<sup>48</sup>Incidentally the one blog post is the amateurish first ever post that is offered as an address to community of victims of systemic racism (see *Americanah* 296)

negotiatory strive for a place as black women in patriarchal, white American society. For this purpose, Bhabha's compelling conceptualization of agency, and allied theoretical perspectives notable of which is Bugeja's, proved resourceful in demonstrating the focalising centres' forging of discursive interpersonal and memorial re-alignments forged out of liminality associated with transnational location. The ultimate objective was to address the question of how normative structures and systems of practice that are subject to cross-border trafficking as social remittance are generated in the course of transnational dislocation. In the next chapter these acquired structures, and practices encapsulated here as social remittances, are followed up in the migrating focal agents' social re-establishment upon their return to their communities or origin. This chapter is taken as offering a backdrop against which to apprehend returning migrants' social footing in their home countries. In *HYS* an extrapolative analysis of the focalising characters' social and political postures will be taken up in order to demonstrate the important role transnational experience play in the context of the represented Biafra war of secession.

## Chapter Five: Social remittance optic on three texts

### Introduction

This chapter delves into focalising characters' physical re-entry into their communities of origin, having come a full cycle in their cross-border movement. Enquiry into this return is specifically concerned with the personal, interpersonal and political practices, as well as attitudinal postures they exhibit as returning migrants who are sociologically re-orientated and unassimilably part of the Nigerian body politic (wryly referred to as "Americanah") (*Americanah* 65, 100, 395; 'Imitation' 38). In this undertaking, *Americanah*, a narrative that exclusively expatiates on the theme of migration, otherwise presented as motific fragments in the rest of the oeuvre, is taken as critical scaffolding to foreground processes only gestured to in the rest of the oeuvre by means of narrative implicatures. Specifically, the processes by which social remittance is generated as examined in the previous chapter provide scaffolding premises by which to deductively appreciate the returning migrants' altered social attitudes and practices. In other words, with reference to *Half of a Yellow Sun* (HYS), the account for the figure of the Americanah proffered in the previous chapter in the light of *Americanah*, presents a postulate for what transpires before the point at which the narrative text in HYS begins. HYS sets off at a politically heady point in the history of the Nigerian nation soon after independence. In this respect it is significant that this juncture in Nigerian history is marked by the return from the United Kingdom by one of the principal focalising characters, Olanna (HYS 29). Odenigbo, another significant character, is said to be "*a little crazy* ... [as] he had spent too many years ... overseas" (HYS 3 emphasis added).

Being Americanah is here approached as being at an in-between location that is pertinent to approaching how the characters are enabled to socially discharge insurgent normative structures and systems of practice. In this sense, non-migrants' wry identification of returnees as Americanah serve the double function of recognizing these returnees' social aberrance and peculiarities (for its wry connotations) but yet permit these aberrant individuals a social space to exercise their atypical tendencies. This is to contend that despite their obvious nonconformity, they are nonetheless tolerated and in effect affording these individuals fondly designated as Americanah free space to socially articulate themselves. This accommodation of Americanah is particularly crucial in the social

remittance process, since their effective transmission, Levitt reminds us, depends on characteristics of the carrier of social remittance content(*The Transnational Villagers* 66). Individuals of reputable standing, Levitt avers, “get listened to more” (*The Transnational Villagers* 66). To be an Americanah is thus to possess the licence to be different, to be bold and to be socially improvisatory yet without being seen as unwarrantedly disruptive. It is for this reason, for example, that Doris’s “unusual” (*Americanah* 402) dressing habit in *Americanah* is viewed with tolerance rather than with resistance and opprobrium because she is a returnee from America. A further illustration of this free hand privilege available to Americanah is clear from Ifemelu’s bold affront on Auntie Onenu’s taste reflected in her magazine as the latter is interviewing her for the position of features editor. As they leave after the interview, Ranyinudo is stunned: “Talking to your new boss like that, ha! If you had not come from America, she would have fired you immediately” (*Americanah* 393). However, to contravene norms without credentials of “having lived abroad”(like the case of the minor character Ojiugo who conducts and dresses herself scandalisingly at Nsukka campus) is to provoke social reproach (*Americanah* 238). To understand how returnees socially remit is thus to acknowledge their significance as a part of the growing community of Nigerians identifying themselves in the fictional Nigeria as Nigeropolitans (*Americanah* 405, 407), but which non-migrant Nigerians wryly set apart as Americanah. Since in this dissertation the approach in exploring the guiding objectives is through the tool of focalisation, focal characters are privileged in demonstrating returnees’ role in discharging normative structures and systems of practice nurtured abroad. But this does not imply that non-focal characters, be they returnees or non-migrant, will serve no purpose in this exercise. Rather they will be interrogated to the extent that their worldviews serve to reinforce or elucidate social remittance roles of the focalising characters. Doris’s alienation, for example, only serve to illuminate Ifemelu’s commitment in the latter’s socio-political projects she embarks on when she arrives in Lagos from America. On the other hand non-migrants’ world outlook provide a socio-political canvas against which focal characters’ attitudes and values are determined as aberrant and therefore as remittances.

This chapter is structured in terms of Levitt’s categories of social remittance, namely as normative structures and systems of practice(“Social Remittances” 933–36; *The Transnational Villagers* 59–63). The following section explores the first of these, followed by a praxeological analysis in the next section, where the interventional dimension of the normative structures, as systems of practice, is considered. The sobriquet Americanah, as fond a designation for returnees, is appropriated as a trope suggesting

a sociologically privileged individual and who has earned it by having undertaken what from the perspective of the aspiring but non-mobile Nigerians is seen as a successful adventure against all odds to conquer America and return to Nigeria. In usage of this sobriquet, specifically in *Americanah*, there are traces of heroism attaching to those engaging in cross-border circulation as opposed to those who “went to America and got lost” or who “went to America and refused to come back” like the case of Bartholomew, Auntie Uju’s Nigerian American partner (*Americanah* 116 italics in the original). In *HYS* there is an aura of pride as those returning from overseas are received at the airport, indicated by an elaborate welcome arrangement by a family that Olanna meets at Enugu airport: “He is the first in our village to go overseas, and our people have prepared a dance for him. The dance troupe will meet us in Ikeduru” (*HYS* 27).

In this chapter, an illustrative description of the focalising characters’ attitudes and practices vis-à-vis those of non-movers, with a concomitant linking with the radical agency examined in previous chapter, serves the precautionary purpose of foreclosing possibility that the returnees are engaging in social extemporization. This insures the validity of asserting the relevance of a transnational location in vernacularized interventions (to borrow Levitt and Merry’s term for the process of lending a localised tinge to intervention measures that have served similar purposes in a different localities(441)).

### **Diagnosing the radical subject: Analytic Utility of Private Experiences in ‘A Private Experience’**

Analysis of the short story ‘A Private Experience’ provides an apt preliminary background for asserting that a returning migrant is necessarily a radical subject both in terms of espoused vision and in terms of practical engagements. In what establishes a lens by which to assert that protagonists in *Americanah* (Ifemelu) and *HYS* (Odenigbo and Olanna) present as radical subjects, ‘A Private Experience’ constructs intersectional ironies built on a set of contrasts materialising from threshold transnational location of Chika, the protagonist. Chika (a middleclass Catholic and Igbo young woman) and an unidentified modest Hausa Muslim woman, find themselves in the middle of sectarian violence at a market in Kano. Chika is clueless about what has transpired but is saved by the Hausa woman who is astute in local conflict dynamics though less concerned about the fact that it is a festering violence. The Hausa woman is wrapped in her own private experience as a woman. The two hide in a derelict

shop from the violent rioters, heightening another irony, since the violence pits Muslims against Christians. The Muslims are reacting to an incident where an Igbo Christian man is said to have desecrated the Holy Koran after driving over it. As they await the violence to subside, their conversation drifts to their private lives in a way that undermines the narratives of ethnic and religious incompatibilities propagated by two British media houses, BBC radio and *The Guardian*. As a narrative gesture towards possibilities of intimate cross-ethnic and cross-religious relationships, the Hausa woman reports to Chika of her aching breast but contrary to this, the BBC radio reportage is a recycling of stock narrative of atavistic violence. Proleptically, the violence is attributed to sectarianism and “ethnic tension” (‘A Private Experience’ 54), which infuriates Chika. *The Guardian* similarly fetches the easier explanation for the violence by writing that ““the reactionary Hausa-speaking Muslims of the North have a history of violence against non-Muslims”” (‘A Private Experience’ 55). As they engage in the conversation, Chika is fascinatedly absorbed in the seeming inscrutable nature of the woman, indicating Chika’s sense of alienation not only from her but also from the pressing and uncanny reality of conflict-prone Nigeria. In the deliberate failure to name the woman, this sense of alienation is accentuated, maintaining both her (the Muslim woman’s) aura of enigma and alienation of Chika as the focalising agent.

Chika’s political consciousness is simultaneously rooted in incommensurable materialities of America, characterised by values of political liberty, and of Nigeria founded on *commandement* under the military regime of Sani Abacha. Through a sleight of impicature, Adichie evokes these incommensurate materialities through panning Chika’s eyes to the cloths she has on, just immediately after a graphic description of street violence. The graphic details of the street violence are ranged out, including acrid air filled with smoke of burning human bodies, helter-skelter run for safety, and then an analeptic revelation of the trigger of the violence (a Christian man runs over the Koran), and the repulsing description of the beheaded Igbo man. At the end of this catalogue of violence-ravaged street and trigger of the violence, attention shifts to the benign Hausa woman offering Chika her cloth so that she sits on it in the dusty room. At this gentle offer, despite the BBC’s and *The Guardian*’s claim of ethnic and religious incompatibilities, Chika’s eyes pans to her own T-shirt, invested with the incommensurate symbolism that recall America’s avowed civil liberties (connoted by the Statue of Liberty printed on the T-shirt) and which, arguably, she has first-hand experience through visiting her relatives in New York:



Chika looks at the threadbare wrapper on the floor; it is probably one of the two the woman owns, she looks down at her own denim skirt and the red T-shirt embossed with a picture of the Statue of Liberty, both of which she bought when she and Nedi spent a few summer weeks with relatives in New York. ('A Private Experience' 46)

By bringing to view these incommensurabilities, courtesy of her transnational in-between location, Chika as focalising character provokes us into a deliberation on the absurdity of claims of ethnic and religious basis of violence in Nigeria. Her travel credentials therefore afford a location from which a subtle aporetic critique of persistent violence along religious and ethnic lines is launched. She is sympathetic to Nnedi's view that "riots do not happen in a vacuum, that religion and ethnicity are often politicized because the ruler is safe if the hungry ruled are killing one another" ('A Private Experience' 48). The Hausa woman also dismantles the same claim of essential ethnic and religious animosity when she declares that the violence is the "work of evil" ('A Private Experience' 48). Arguably, therefore lack of civil liberty in Nigeria and symbolic attribution to America through the Statue of Liberty embossed on her T-shirt, recrudesce as haunting coupled spectres from her transnational location.

As argued above, one way to detect Chika's remittance of American political vocabulary (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 8)<sup>49</sup> is seizing upon the fact that her transnational in-betweenness precipitated her haunted sense of civil liberty. Apart from this, however, contrast between her way of seeing the violence and that of the Hausa woman provides another criterion by which to determine that hers is invested with radical political imperative. Throughout the narrative Chika apprehends what confronts her in terms that suggests she finds them as reprehensible and thus requiring remedial engagement, whereas the Muslim woman finds the same as routinised part of her survival and she fully knows that "[e]very time when they are rioting, they break market" ('A Private Experience' 49). She says this, however, not with a lingering bitterness that the violence brings about loss of life and property. As soon as she says this, her attention sharply shifts to her mundane personal concerns, especially with her breast that she says is "burning-burning like pepper" ('A Private Experience' 49). At the faint possibility of the loss of her eldest daughter, Halima, with whom she has been hawking groundnuts,

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<sup>49</sup> As captured in chapter one, Krawatzek and Müller-Funk define political vocabulary (as part of the more encompassing term political remittance) as "political terms, symbols and slogans, as well as the specific framing of political messages" (8). Chika's T-shirt souvenir, with the image of Statue of Liberty can be seen in these terms as part of the political vocabulary she has brought from her visit to her relatives in New York. The fact that she returns home with the souvenir indicates that she relates with the ideals embodied in the symbols carried on it.

she breaks down in tears. From Chika's perspective, her "crying is private, as though she is carrying out a necessary ritual that involves no one else" ('A Private Experience' 51) while Chika expects one to disconsolately mourn loudly "[h]old me and comfort me because I cannot deal with this alone" ('A Private Experience' 51 italics in the original), consistent with her altered sense of ethnic and religious violence that is subtly confronted as examine above.

This exploration of 'A Private Experience' demonstrates that characters with migration backgrounds stand in sharp contrast in terms of how they experience and apprehend Nigeria's societal dynamics upon their return there. Chika's heightened attentiveness to the Muslim woman foregrounds her experience of dislocation as well as fascination at the fact that the woman does not manifest any drive to exert herself in the face of violent nature of the Nigerian society projected, except only in momentary search for refuge. In the following analyses of *Americanah* and *HYS*, I seized upon this reasoning that returning migrants conspicuously stand out against the non-mobile compatriots with respect to the values, attitudes and practices they espouse.

### **The unassimilable "Americanah": radical returnee in *HYS* and *Americanah***

With reference to *Americanah*, it was observed in the previous chapter that Ifemelu emerges as a radical subject in a number of ways. Firstly, she strives against all odds to achieve basic economic empowerment without resort to a patriarchal channel of achieving this, namely (like Ranyinudo) a view of men "as sources of things" (*Americanah* 396). But as was argued, via Kristeva (*Powers of Horror* 6) and Bhabha(179), in relation to her encounter with the tennis coach, that she attempts this patriarchal channel ingrains an impetus against accomplishments by means of such a channel. Secondly, as pertinent to securing her space as a black woman, she hones a sly civility critical in disrupting invisible but insidious structures and infrastructures of racism, thereby disrupting America's "routine of ignoring routine" racism (Levine, "'The Strange Familiar': Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*" 588, 591). With an eye on the Nigerian context, the agency she achieves is here approached as a subject of translational work in its being adapted to social imperatives and dynamics of her Lagos community and Nigerian body politic as a whole.

In order to guard against the possible but simplistic claim that returnees learn social lessons abroad which they then proceed to apply in their home communities, it is worthy to anticipate the question

of the stability of normative structures and related systems of practice attending the pre-migration lives of those intending to migrate or have migrated. Have the social conditions which prevailed in Lagos, and the wider Nigeria, before Ifemelu emigrated remained stable through the time she has been away in America? On one extreme of a spectrum of possible answers to this question is an affirmative that those social conditions are still intact and operative. On the other extreme, possible significant transformation in Lagos's, and by extension Nigeria's, social fabric can be contemplated. After all Ifemelu herself is aware of possibility of flux in Lagos social character: "She was no longer sure what was new in Lagos and what was new in herself" (*Americanah* 387). If one were to maintain, however, that Lagos's predominant social attitudes, values and practices have remained static, then it would be a matter of logic that Ifemelu is returning having learnt lessons from the American society about how best to tackle those social challenges that have obstinately inhered within Nigeria's social and national make up. But this would necessarily be a vulgar affirmation. As Ifemelu acknowledges, Lagos sociality has gone through a transformation and that it is necessary for her to not only grasp this transformation but to also re-orient herself and re-adapt to this altered social ecology or otherwise remain alienated as Doris and the other Nigerpolitan members (see *Americanah* 407–10). Re-orientation, however, is not with an eye on unquestioning melding in terms of prevailing discourses (notably patriarchy, class stratification and social justice), but with an eye on mustering, then challenging, the discursive structures and infrastructures undergirding these discourses. In short to socially remit in this context is approached as an agentic capacity (rather than a stable set of skills and knowledge) honed transnationally and translated into the processes of confronting a different configuration of societal dynamics local to her homeland (Levitt and Merry 443, 446).

One strategic analytic move adopted in the previous chapter was to consider *Americanah* as a synchronic or contrapuntal representation of a memorial-historical dialectic, a la Bugeja. In addition to Bugeja's lens that enables a view of this narrative as asynchronic working of memory attempting to muster and master disjunctive transnational experience, there is a diachronic view of the narrative, complementary to the synchronic angle that Bugeja's prism contemplates. This is to suggest that it is also strategic here to approach *Americanah* in its linearity, involving a beginning characterised by the romance of youth on one hand and frustrations of living in Nigeria on the other, the departure for America as a putative place of opportunity but fraught with frustrations that are subsequently overcome, then the subsequent return to Nigeria after realizing success. In the previous chapter, the

assumption of synchronicity of the narrative was meant as a critical strategy to trace the development of Ifemelu's calculative and interrogative agency. Having accomplished this purpose a return to linearity of the narrative provides an opportunity to demonstrate how this agency is deployed, through a process of translation, in confronting Nigeria's social problematics.

In order to outline what Ifemelu socially remits to her homeland, it is necessary to examine how she grapples with a palpably transformed society that confronts her on arrival in Lagos. This re-orientation largely happens through her interaction with her old school friends and through her workplace experience at Auntie Onenu's *Zoe* establishment. In these interactions there is a keen attention to these other characters' worldview. Re-uniting with her old friends, who have now come of age and are marriageable, provides a number of advantages in the narrative. Firstly, re-entry into Lagos's social glamour incidentally happens from an insider position as Ifemelu re-joins her old friends. This would contrast with her relation with Auntie Uju, Uche and Adesuwa, between whom an age distance lends her outsider status as far as Lagos women's clandestine activities are concerned. Secondly, re-uniting with the friends eliminates the barrier that a lack of genial acquaintances would implicate, considering that the point of her arrival also corresponds to point of closure in the narrative. The less protracted her re-orientation, therefore, the more strategic for this closure with the overwhelming sense that "[s]he had done it. She had come back" (*Americanah* 388 emphasis added).

This second of these two reasons is particularly applicable to our understanding of how Ranyinudo's worldview is presented as archetypal of Lagos's mercenary young women glamouring for wealthy men, whether for marriage, patriarchal security or as stepping-stones to middle class status. Ranyinudo's effusive re-connection with Ifemelu leaves no question as to the attitudes of young Lagos women that she represents. It does not take much in the way of formalities between them before she lapses into what obsesses "all the hungry women in Lagos" (*Americanah* 449):

"The wedding was something else, the best wedding I've been to. I wonder if you'll remember the bride .... Her husband has major money. Her engagement ring is bigger than Zuma rock." (*Americanah* 386)

"And I met someone o. He saw me when I was waiting outside for the mass to end ... I think this one is a serious material. Did I tell you my mother was saying novenas to end my relationship when I was dating Ibrahim? .... His name is Ndudi. And you should have seen his watch! He's into oil. His business card has Nigerian and international offices." (*Americanah* 387)

How this instant and unbridled effusion fares with Ifemelu, (and therefore how typical Lagos woman's attitudes about marriage and economic independence is focalised) is clear from the unmistakable boredom Ifemelu evinces from listening to Ranyinudo's materialistic reading of her friend's wedding: "Ifemelu stared out of the window, half listening, thinking how unpretty Lagos was, roads infested with potholes, houses springing up unplanned like weeds" (*Americanah* 386). The loose paratactic sentence structure coming to a cadence of a demoting simile, simulates a sudden burst of annoyance. Contrasted with Ranyinudo's enthusiasm, the fact that Ifemelu's attention switches to conspicuous disorder and ugliness of Lagos streets subtly indicates her being turned off by the former's materialism and obsession with marriage. From the narrative discourse, however, there are discernible indices of a studious Ifemelu engaged in a mental calculation in relation to the figure of a woman that plays out from Ranyinudo's enthusiasm. Rendered in Category B Reflector (Negative) narrative mode, where the narrative voice recedes to the background though we are left with a sense that Ifemelu as the focal agent is raptly engaged not only in mulling over Ranyinudo's largely monologic discourse about living in Lagos as a woman, but also in hypothetically contemplating herself living the same life as Ranyinudo. The quasi-rhetorical question "Before she left, were bridesmaids banished from church services because their dresses had spaghetti straps?" (*Americanah* 387) expresses a consciousness that is attempting to reckon the truth of what has just been said, then as if steadying itself in the bewildering changes in Lagos social life, it proceeds to hastily answer its own question mentally: "She did not think so, but she was no longer sure. She was no longer sure what was new in Lagos and what was new in herself" (*Americanah* 387). In the midst of Ranyinudo's monologic enthusiasm, there is Ifemelu's appreciable calculative and interrogative mental alertness into which the former's archetypal life is submitted as if to gauge its soundness:

Ifemelu took the cold bottle of malt from Ranyinudo and *wondered* if this would have been her life if she had not left, if she would be like Ranyinudo, working for an advertising company, living in a one-bedroom flat whose rent her salary could not pay, attending a Pentecostal church where she was an usher, and dating a married chief executive who bought her business-class tickets to London. (*Americanah* 389)

Here there is an implicature of a shudder and revulsion. In subsequent sentences, this pervasive revulsion resolves into a sarcastic tone in the way the chief executive in question is mocked, in effect ridiculing Ranyinudo's own taste: "Is it me or does he look like a tortoise?" Ifemelu said" (*Americanah* 389). By ridiculing Ranyinudo's taste and therefore her orientation to life as a woman, Ifemelu leaves

no doubt as to what her attitude is towards this orientation. Even what appears as envy for Ranyinudo's life of effortless wealth through concubinage assumes a sarcastic dimension when what she (Ifemelu) later suggests to the owner of *Zoe* magazine is considered (she offers suggestion that "a woman who has actually achieved something real on her own" (*Americanah* 392) should be featured). In an unvoiced wish Ifemelu "felt something between fascination and longing for Ranyinudo's life. A life in which she waved a hand and things fell from the sky, things that she quite simply expected should fall from the sky" (*Americanah* 390). But this is a life that from her sober advice to Auntie Onenu she believes should be confronted through the mass media. When Auntie Onenu solicits Ifemelu's opinion about *Zoe* vis-à-vis its competitor, *Glass*, she makes the radical suggestion that *Zoe* should "profile a woman who has actually achieved something real on her own" against which Auntie Onenu reacts with incredulity. It is reported that she "seemed astonished" (*Americanah* 392). Astonishment at the suggestion bespeaks the latter's comfort with the social status quo and order of priorities with regard to a woman's place in the patriarchal order. This is starkly at variance with that of Ifemelu who, in a wishful imagination of a *Zoe* take-over reveals a aspiration to marshal it to "a vibrant, relevant companion for Nigerian women" (*Americanah* 392). Unmistakably, therefore, Ifemelu sees as monumental the oppressive patriarchal regime in place in Lagos, and by extension in Nigeria, to a degree that it calls for an unprecedented engagement. Summatively, from the extensively foregrounded woman's glamour for marriage (including resorting to unorthodox schemes as ensnaring potential marriage partners through being impregnated (*Americanah* 389)) or of woman's revelling in marital life, we are placed at a vantage point (Ifemelu's) from which a woman's excessive vocational commitment to marriage is cast into relief by that vantage point's own ironic expectations. The effects of differential relations between these two vantage points resolve into an absurdity that, from the principal vantage point (Ifemelu's), needs to be questioned:

It surprised her how quickly, during reunions with old friends, the subject of marriage came up, a waspish tone in the voices of the unmarried, a smugness in those of the married. *Ifemelu wanted to talk about the past, about the teachers they had mocked and the boys they had liked*, but marriage was always the preferred topic – whose husband was a dog, who was on a desperate prowl, posting too many dressed pictures of herself on Facebook, whose man had disappointed after four years and left her to marry a small girl he could control. (*Americanah* 398)

In what occasions a glaring twist of irony, the need to re-unite on the basis of a more nostalgic shared past runs into the need to confront what her friends suppose is a woman's prime threat of the present in the form of marriage. Though this study is not concerned with authorial data, it is easy here to fall back to Adichie's own reason as to why there lies an absurdity in a woman's dedication to marriage as

a career. A woman's approach to marriage as an achievement, Adichie opines, construes marital relation as based on an imbalance that is invisible to the same women glamourising it (*Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, sec. Seventh Suggestion).<sup>50</sup> For a woman of marriageable age, Adichie further adds, being unmarried smacks of "a deep personal failure" and the more reason for her, therefore, to make a career of marriage (*We Should All Be Feminists*, para.50).

In the last chapter, while deliberating on memory's interrogative quality through dialogic calculation presented as proleptic and analeptic narrative moves, it was shown how the various dialogic elements (particularly the fraught romantic life of Auntie Uju, Ifemelu's traumatic sexual encounter, her consensual sexual activity) become sublated in engendering a feminist political desire. A seminal epiphanic realization of imbalance in heterosexual relations, where a man is always taking away something preserved for him and the woman is always surrendering it, expresses here as an operative force undergirding a view of marriage glamour among Lagos women as exercise in absurdity. However, the operative political desire in play in this context does not exclusively obtain provenance in experience of gender discrimination. In what should be seen as translation of radical subjectivity nurtured in context of America's racial discourse, a woman's vocational pursuit of marriage comes across as absurd inasmuch as this "[pushes] women to make terrible choices" (Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*, para.49) in the same way white hegemony pushes Ifemelu to make the disastrous choice of straightening her hair while in America. It is only in a process of retroversion that the absurdity of this apparent choice crystallises to her, subsequently opting to revert to her natural hair. Attesting to the translational working of this agency is a view of the parallel between the terrible choices Ifemelu makes as a black woman with curly hair in America and the equally terrible choices Lagos women must make in the patriarchal order of identification. Ifemelu's own resort to the disastrous choice to straighten her hair if only to conform to America's hegemonic notions of professionalism run parallel to Lagos women's choice to invest in marriage ambitions under the patriarchal imperative that women will "expire" quickly or that "a woman is like a flower. Our time passes quickly" (HYS 41; *Americanah* 301) (to adopt Arize's

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<sup>50</sup> "We condition girls to aspire to marriage and we do not condition boys to aspire to marriage, and so there is already a terrible imbalance at the start. The girls will grow up to be women preoccupied with marriage. The boys will grow up to be men who are not preoccupied with marriage. The women marry those men. The relationship is automatically uneven because the institution matters more to one than the other. Is it any wonder that, in so many marriages, women sacrifice more, at a loss to themselves, because they have to constantly maintain an uneven exchange? One consequence of this imbalance is the very shabby and very familiar phenomenon of two women publicly fighting over a man, while the man remains silent." (Adichie, *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, sec. Seventh Suggestion)



view in *HYS* and Ifemelu's mother in *Americanah*, respectively) and thus must sooner submit to a man. Ifemelu's old friend's (Priye's) confession about Lagos women's guiding principle while making decisions about marriage partners is indeed revealing of the potentiality of terrible choices that Adichie is wary about. Priye pontificates thus: "...That girl [one Mosope] never understood the first rule of life in Lagos. You do not marry the man you love. You marry the man who can best maintain you" (*Americanah* 399). This scene (see especially *Americanah* 399–400) characterised by an unpretentious exuberance of Ifemelu's old friends is strategically presented in what is intended as objective direct speech, with sparse but highly instructive reporting phrases that betray Ifemelu's (as the focalising agent's) furtive mocking attitude to her friends' worldview as pertains marriage and marital life:

"My phone has not stopped ringing since last week!" Priye said *triumphantly*, pushing back the auburn straight weave that fell across her eye *since it had been sewn in to do so*, Ifemelu was *distracted* by the *brittle* pink colour of her nails. Priye had the slightly *sinister* manner of someone who could get other people to do what she wanted. *And she glittered* – her *yellow-gold* earrings, the *metal* studs on her designer bag, the *sparkly bronze* lipstick. (*Americanah* 399 emphasis added)

Even before this description of Priye, her figure immediately presents to Ifemelu as fitting a medium with which to conjure and estimate broader public standards by which this woman's achievement is determined, not only as event planner but also as shrewd in the parlance of Lagos women: "Ifemelu imagined how people would talk about Priye. She is doing well, they would say, she is doing really well" (*Americanah* 399). The sarcasm in iteration of achievement credential lends it a sense of excess, as much as it alludes to the equal excess and absurdity of the public opinion itself. Predominance of direct speech in the presentation of Ifemelu's re-union with her friends imparts the impression that each of Ifemelu's friends who speaks is making an unabashed, guiltless admission of what, from the focal angle, ought to be antisocial. It is the description of Priye, and her social demeanour that particularly reveals the terms by which she is perceived and terms by which we are compelled to evaluate Lagos women as well as collective, public taste. The hyperbolic rendition of her relishing ceaseless call traffic on her phone, implied in the adverb "triumphantly" complements with the distracting garishness about her grandiose and synthetic charm ("it had been *sewn* in to do so", "brittle", "glittered", "metal", "sparkly bronze") that belie a detectable sinister nature. That she has public admiration at all, therefore, as an egotistic woman asks us to determine the adoring public as also cheap, gullible, and requiring remedial interventions. From the invariable gesture at the value attached to the number of politicians' in

attendance at weddings, it is deducible that such is the crowning mark, imparting a seal of prestige to the wedded woman:

“It was a *very* successful wedding: we had seven governors in attendance, *seven!*” she [Priye] said.

“And none of them knew the couple, I’m sure,” Ifemelu said drily.

Priye gestured, a shrug, an upward flick of her palm, to show how irrelevant that was.

“Since when has the success of weddings been measured by how many governors attend?”

Ifemelu asked.

“It shows you’re connected. It shows prestige. Do you know how powerful governors in this country are? Executive power is not a small thing,” Priye said.

“Me, I want as many governors as possible to come to my own wedding o. it shows levels, serious levels,” Ranyinudo said. (*Americanah* 399 emphasis added)

But we know that this crowning personage is itself presented as disfigured with sleaze, particularly in relation to women. From the sweeping, olfactory and somatic profiling of Abuja as sordid, the figure of the politician features as the monopoly of this sordidness. It is reported that in Abuja “[t]he air smelled of power .... It smelled of money, easy money, easily exchanged money .... It dripped, too, of sex” (*Americanah* 454). It is also reported that “Obinze’s friend Chidi said he didn’t chase women in Abuja because he didn’t want to step on a minister’s or senator’s toes. Every attractive young woman here became mysteriously suspect” (*Americanah* 454). Admitting the supposed crowning attendance of governors as criteria for adjudging the success of wedding function does, therefore, permit our calculation of Ifemelu’s friends’ values, or lack thereof, because of their bestowing these political personages the seal of prestige. We are bound to conclude that Priye and Ranyinudo, are complicit (wittingly or otherwise) in fostering raw imperatives of political power, injurious to themselves as women. By benchmarking success on the basis of another tarnished and discredited yardstick, whether they do this innocently or not, we are bound to infer the focalising agent’s reading of the mistaken or parochial character of these aspirations. The enthusiasm they effuse, therefore, downgrades to an exercise in inanity at the least, while at worst constitutes an exercise in self-undermining as women. We recall here that this exchange between the friends transpires under Ifemelu’s sardonic studiousness, a fact that is made evident in her riposte amidst the conversation (“And none knew the couple”, “since when has the success of wedding been measured by how many governors attend?”), in the choice of descriptive adjectives in reporting phrases (“drily”), and in her painstaking, ironic rendition of Priye’s body language (“Priye gestured, a shrug, an upward flick of her palm, to show how irrelevant that was”). Riposte, choice of adjective and meticulous rendition of her friend’s bodily expression, present as

indices of Ifemelu's deconstructive value structure through which her friends' enthusiastic pontification on what they suppose as women's worthy pursuits are downgraded.

From this extrapolative look, the conclusion that comes to view is that Ifemelu, as a focalising agent, has the ability to grasp the transparencies by which women in her homeland are made complicit in producing their own inequality. Interventional moves she engages, pertinent to this problematic and which recall her disruptive and subversive social commitment in America, will be detailed in the next section.

We shift attention to the migration shadow that is cast on the narrative beginnings in *HYS* and how this can be exploited as a function of how social and political commitments of three of the main focalising agents in the narrative develop. These three focal angles have been selected here for reasons that will be made clear shortly below.

From this start, it should be stated that though *HYS* does not present returning migrants *qua* migrants, a focus that like *Americanah* would require delving into their experiences as returnees, the fact that the focal characters' overseas credentials are deliberately reported from the very outset in the narrative, is strong enough indication that we are required to take critical note of these credentials in relation to how the narrative unfolds and how other focal non-migrants (specifically Ugwu) develop in the narrative. The absence of express narrative articulation of what has been termed migritude, as literary pre-occupation with migrant subjectivity as well as agency (Foster 6–8), does not, however, foreclose the value that the focalising characters' migrant backgrounds have for understanding the development of central concerns, including character relations and their development, in *HYS*. To delineate this value, it is necessary to approach two of the principal focal characters, namely Olanna and Odenigbo, as depicting the figure of *Americanah* appropriated here as a trope for elucidating the returning migrant positioned as a radical subject. In the introduction to this chapter, parameters of an *Americanah* were set out as possession of the primary credential of breaching the borders of metropolitan West seen as heroic achievement, a feat legitimising a licence to be socially different and as such be socially improvisatory yet remain socially tolerable. Appreciating how Olanna and Odenigbo render these parameters establishes crucial premises for demonstrating how they are involved in processes of socially remitting as focalising agents. This implicates questions of worldview and thus of focalisation. The question that will be answered here is: whose standards or worldview is it that determines

temperamental eccentricity of such characters as Odenigbo? Tackling this question is pertinent to our subsequent reconstruction of what is remitted and how the process is made possible.

To tackle the question posed above, Akpome's incisive analysis of structure and narrative technique in *HYS* provides a convincing description of the narrative's focalisation scheme from where this analysis will depart. Akpome rightly concludes that narrative perspective in *HYS* can be best understood in terms of Stanzel's typological formulation of narrative point of view where three typological distinctions are contemplated, namely authorial narrative situation, first person narrative situation and figural narrative situation (cited in Akpome, 'Focalisation and Polyvocality' 26).<sup>51</sup> Again Akpome persuasively justifies the usefulness of the figural category in elucidating relations of influence between Odenigbo and Ugwu on one hand, and between Olanna and Ugwu on the other ('Focalisation and Polyvocality' 28–30). Akpome establishes his analytic premises thus: there are five identifiable focalising agents in *HYS*, namely Ugwu, Olanna, Richard, Odenigbo and Kainene, the first three being categorised as direct or primary and the remaining two as secondary or indirect focalisers ('Focalisation and Polyvocality' 27). These categories envision direct focalisers as providing "im-mediate" (Stanzel cited in Akpome, 'Focalisation and Polyvocality' 27) access to the focalised presented as "narrated perception"<sup>52</sup> whereas indirect focalisers are those whose ideological and political worldviews operate such that they directly or vicariously impinge on or shape the focalising functions of primary focalising agents (Akpome, 'Focalisation and Polyvocality' 28). This is a crucial point that Akpome offers in the objective to explain the transmission of social remittance content from an Americanah to Ugwu as a non-migrant character. In his cautionary explanation, Akpome is quick to pre-empt the implication of a hierarchical relationship between the primary and secondary categories of focalising agents he derives. In other words he obviates the anticipation that this typology is derived in terms of scale or level of importance or value but in terms of how the focalising transpires. On one hand primary focalisers provide a cognitive medium by which we grasp objects in a narrative world, while on the other hand secondary focalisers provide ideological, political and psychological compasses that orient focalising functions of primary counterparts (Akpome, 'Focalisation and Polyvocality' 28). These relations of influence, however, do not occur as relations between primary and secondary focalisers, *qua* primary and secondary collective

<sup>51</sup> In Simpson's typology of narratives with respect to focalisation, Stanzel's figural narrative situation conforms to B category narrative in reflector mode (57).

<sup>52</sup> By "narrated perception" Jahn suggests a minimalistic narratorial activity with a concomitant preservation of the sense that "the reflector's track is fully active and supplies all content" in the narrative discourse (para.N3.2.33).

entities. On the contrary, orienting functions of each secondary focal agent is significantly foregrounded in particular primary agents and not in any other. This enables Akpome to trace the vectors of ideological, psychological and political influence with respect to the focalisation scheme in *HYS*:

... it is clear that a substantial part of Ugwu's psychological, intellectual and ideological metamorphoses occurs under the overt and covert auspices of Odenigbo, his Master. For their parts, Richard and Olanna operate under the considerable influence of Kainene and Odenigbo respectively, even if this is much less foregrounded than in Ugwu's case. ('Focalisation and Polyvocality' 28)

In terms of focalisation relations as contemplated by Akpome, there is, therefore, psychological, ideological and intellectual unidirectional channel of influence between Odenigbo and Ugwu, between Kainene and Richard, and between Odenigbo and Olanna. A fourth channel should be added as that between Olanna and Ugwu. As we have already indicated that Odenigbo conforms to the trope of Americanah, the influence relations between himself and Ugwu as a peasant and a perceived "ignoramus" (this is Odenigbo's well-intentioned reproach which he uses in reference to the latter) is pertinent here for mining remittance of normative structures. Nominally Kainene is an Americanah but the influence vector in which she provides a compass has Richard, a British expatriate, on the other end. In addition, Kainene's enigmatic disposition is said to pre-date her emigration to England ("She [Olanna] wondered when it [Kainene's disposition] all changed. Before they went to England, for sure .... Perhaps it was during their secondary-school years at Heathgrove. Perhaps even before." (*HYS* 37)) For this reason, the Kainene-Richard focal relations will not be pursued, except only in as far as they are crucial in elucidating that of Olanna, Odenigbo and Ugwu. This explains why, with respect to *HYS*, focus will only privilege the three focal angles of Odenigbo, Olanna and Ugwu. In view of the fact that Akpome does not premeditate the Olanna-Ugwu influence trajectory, this chapter demonstrates the importance of Olanna in the development and emergence of Ugwu, from being an "ignoramus" and son of peasant, to the symbolic role as a repository of the Biafran experience and as committed post-Biafran re-teller of the ugliness of war. This focalisation coupling between Ugwu and her mistress, Olanna, particularly lends itself for exploitation towards demonstrating a social remittance perspective on *HYS*. The Odenigbo-Ugwu influence vector is a more compounded one, given the more marked eclectic profile of his personality and values he advocates for. Though this is not to diminish the viability of influence relation between the two in rendering a social remittance perspective in the novel, the interest in focal relation proceed with an abundance of caution. We are made aware that Odenigbo is

an erudite person and has “closely” read Western philosophical treatises including Hegel, Hume, Voltaire and Locke.<sup>53</sup>

‘Nobody can take Hegel seriously. Have you read him closely? He’s funny, very funny. But Hume and Voltaire and Locke felt the same way about Africa,’ Odenigbo said. ‘Greatness depends on where you are coming from. It’s just like the Israelis who were asked what they thought of Eichmann’s trial the other day, and one of them said he did not understand how the Nazis could have been thought great by anyone at any time. But they were, weren’t they?’ (HYS 50)

Arguably, therefore, Odenigbo’s combative energy, with respect to his major problem of Africa’s unequal status in global power configuration, partly obtains from his independent reading and research.<sup>54</sup> Indiscriminate labelling of all his social, political and civic commitments as social remittance may therefore raise questions of validity of such blanket labelling. Just as this view is convincing, and to the extent that he is “crazy” because of a temperament peculiarly foreign (according to Ugwu’s aunt), it is equally invalid to discount a provenance of his social and political radicalism in migration experience. After all, Ugwu’s aunt couples exile and reading as reasons for Odenigbo’s queer demeanour (“he had spent too many years reading books overseas” (HYS 3)). It would be an over-ascription of mental and practical power to Auntie (a traditional-minded old woman, with no evidence of formal education and travel) to say with certainty that she is sure that the only thing Odenigbo did while overseas is reading books.

We start here interrogating the three focal angles (Odenigbo’s, Olanna’s and Ugwu’s), in relation to each other and in relation to those of other minor but pertinent characters functioning to illuminate the worldviews of these three focalising agents. We recall that this probing is intended to highlight the radical subjectivity of Odenigbo and Olanna as Americanah and how this radicalism grows in Ugwu as a result of the former two’s influences.

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<sup>53</sup> Hegel, Hume, Locke and Voltaire all had racist ideas about Africans and Africa. To Hegel Africa is “the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* 109) implying that Africans are incapable of self-conscious capacity that underlie the sense of history. On the other hand, Hume believed “negroes ... to be naturally inferior to whites” (Immerwahr 483; Ten 101); while Voltaire held the belief that the black race was necessarily “very inferior” (quoted in Chisick 590). Locke is complicit in legitimizing slavery of the black race in America by asserting that a slave is “[c]aptives taken in a just War” (quoted in Farr 496).

<sup>54</sup> This can be seen as independent reading and research, unless in his discipline (mathematics) he has a specialty or interest in the thematic areas related to politics of power, especially where Africa’s unequal status is implicated.

Odenigbo has had a good part of his life abroad, a proportion of a life time long enough that a characteristic eccentricity is now ingrained in his temperament, at least as Ugwu's aunty submits to the norms she understands as relates to how people should conduct themselves. Richard also offhandedly describes him as "refreshingly different" (HYS 76). As with an Americanah, a justification for this oddity is also registered in aunty's reminder to Ugwu that Odenigbo is an odd person "[b]ut he is a good man" (HYS 3) and we interpretively assert that this munificence constitutes his eccentricity as viewed from her perspective (her reasoning would be imaged as: Odenigbo is an odd person yet a good person; goodness and oddity do not collocate and he is therefore strange).

The very first narrative statement in *HYS* asks for an appreciation of context against which to justify Odenigbo's glaring peculiarity: "Master was a little crazy; he had spent too many years reading books overseas, talked to himself in his office, did not return greetings, and had too much hair" (HYS 3). From this statement, the immediate norm by which deviance is defined is explicitly established in the terms by which Odenigbo is set aside as "crazy", namely that a person ought not to engage in monologue, must greet in reciprocation and should not cultivate far too much hair than is expected in his society. Deductively, for a crazy person to be good at the same time further compounds the strangeness. In addition there's an expectation that one should exhibit a welcoming affability towards the guests that one receives. Contrary to this, when Ugwu's aunt knocks at his door and after he has been asked in, Odenigbo continues sitting "as though oblivious that he had just asked people in" (HYS 4). The more the narrative progresses at this point, the more this apparent oddity takes shape. There is an extended length of time before Odenigbo initiates a familiarisation conversation with Ugwu, long enough that each of them seems to lose awareness of the other:

After she (Ugwu's aunty) left, Master put his glasses back on and faced his book, *relaxing further* into a slanting position, legs stretched out. *Even when he turned the pages he did with eyes on the book.*

....

Ugwu stood by the door waiting .... The room was silent except for the rustle of Master's page turning .... after a while he sank down to the floor .... He closed his eyes and tried to reimagine this spacious room .... He opened his eyes, overcome by a new wonder, and looked around to make sure it was all real.

"... What's your name?" Master asked, startling him. (HYS 5)

As Odenigbo is absorbed in his reading, Ugwu lapses into a reverie (from which he is suddenly aroused) overwhelmed by the positive prospects of his new employment. From this context, it is obvious that Odenigbo's perceived idiosyncrasy has to do with what pre-occupies his mind and about which he is



reading. Whatever he is reading must be something of which he is passionately keen and the arrival of Ugwu and his aunt has distracted him from it. As Ugwu relates, Odenigbo looks at them “with a faintly distracted expression, as if their presence made it difficult for him to remember something important” (*HYS* 5). Since soon after this report by Ugwu (his aunty having surreptitiously left), Odenigbo becomes again engrossed in the book he is reading, the “something important” he is mentally grappling with must relate to what he is reading, or else if it were unrelated to it he would be too distracted by it to revert to reading. Subsequently, in Odenigbo’s incongruent engagement of Ugwu, where the latter is seized as a screen on which the former’s intellectual obsession is projected, there is a gesture towards what it is: “You know who really killed Lumumba?” Master said, looking up from a magazine. “It was the Americans and the Belgians. It had nothing to do with Katanga.” (*HYS* 10). Clearly, Odenigbo is not assuming intellectual parity with Ugwu, after all the first time Ugwu is brought in front of him, he is introduced as a child (“.... ‘This is the child,’ Ugwu’s aunty said” (*HYS* 4) thus the fact that he poses a question then proceeds to answer it himself presents as a hallmark of one engaging in a quasi-soliloquy. Even the focalising agent (Ugwu) does not seem to assume he is expected to provide reasonable answers, or any at all, only studiously availing himself before the quasi-soliloquising Odenigbo, ingenuous but overawed. We gather this from the reporting phrases used. The perceiving Ugwu simply reports “master said”. Used in report of interrogatives, as the one quoted above, it has the effect that the perceiver (Ugwu) is discharging himself of responsibility to his interlocutor’s interrogative demand. Were the reporting phrase to be “he asked me” there would have been a presumption of worldly parity with his interlocutor. Indeed Ugwu’s responses are largely brief, two-worded phrases (either “Yes, sah” or “No, sah”) only meant as minimal devices to keep Odenigbo talking, an intention that he tacitly declares: “He wanted Master to keep talking, so he could listen to the sonorous voice, the musical blend of English words in his Igbo sentences”(see *HYS* 9–13). This quasi-soliloquy serves two functions. Firstly, it is through the immediacy of it that Odenigbo’s mind, and therefore what obsesses him, is rendered. From this we learn that Odenigbo is passionate about global inequalities and inequities, and his belief that education is a means to create the capacity to comprehend and resist relations of exploitation(*HYS* 11). Secondly, and related to the first, it is a background against which the figure of Ugwu, perceptible in his focalising role, is foregrounded. In his finding incomprehensible Odenigbo’s concerns, is highlighted the irony of such a commitment as Odenigbo’s, for as the latter poses “[h]ow can we resist exploitation if we don’t have the tools to understand exploitation?” (*HYS* 11). Ugwu is a

child, yet he is out of school and resigned to the powerless place at the bottom of the class hierarchy. This resignation is evident in his naïve justification for using the address “sah” in a way that preserves unlimited power for those others addressed as such, while himself surrenders all his power:

Ugwu really preferred *sah*, the crisp power behind the word, and when two men from the Works Department came a few days later to install shelves in the corridor, he told them that they would have to wait for Sah to come home; he would not sign the white paper with typewritten words. He said *Sah* proudly.

‘He is one of these village houseboys,’ one of the men said dismissively ....(HYS 13)

Not only is he incapacitated in terms of literacy (as he does not comprehend what the “white paper with typewritten words” is), but he also declares a preference for a vulnerable disempowered position of one affirming another’s power, an absurdity obvious to one of the men who infers it as “village houseboy[s]” naivety. However, a critical examination of the figural medium of Ugwu, reveals what the narrative discourse promises with respect to confronting the inequalities and inequities foregrounded. In his focalising function, he evinces adoration for Odenigbo which thus opens the promise of his (Odenigbo’s) role as a model. But for this role model relation to work, Ugwu must have the capacity, at best, to integrate Odenigbo’s doctrines into his intellectual scheme, or at the least avail himself as Odenigbo’s impressionable tutelary charge. As though to symbolically prove this impressionable capacity, when he is asked to sing, for no particular reason, he does so with zeal: “... Master said ‘Louder!’ so he raised his voice, and Master kept saying ‘Louder!’ until he was screaming” (HYS 12). As a focalising agent, his impressionable credentials manifest in his predominant inability to make nuanced evaluations and decisions, marked by a prevalence of generic sentences, and a marked preponderance of modality foregrounding Ugwu’s “desires, duties, obligations”(Simpson 51) to Odenigbo towards whom he harbours adoration. His overzealous decision to iron his Master’s sock is best illustrative of this:

He wanted to do more, wanted to give master every reason to keep him, and so one morning, he ironed Master’s socks. They didn’t look rumpled, the black ribbed socks, but he thought they look even better straightened. The hot iron hissed and when he raised it, he saw that half of the sock was glued to it. He froze.(HYS 14)

The rushing, parallel construction “he *wanted* to do more, *wanted* to give master every reason to keep him” emphatically convey a naïve and unconsidered impulsion to please. From this rush of naivety, in search of ways to impress, it ironically turns out Ugwu is searching for every reason, such as the

unnecessary ironing of his master's socks, which could potentially cost him his employment. Arguably, therefore, out of both his impressionable profile and his keen "innate intelligence" he is equipped with requisite capacity to embrace an ethics that furthers experiences of Nigeria's 1967-1970 war time occurrences. This is a capacity deliberately foregrounded in the part of the narrative temporally distinguished as "The Early Sixties", before the consequential *coup de tat*. Later in this chapter, this aspect of Ugwu's trait will be corralled so as to account for authorship of the book attributed to him.

Ugwu momentarily comes to note that as a house servant he has a treatment remarkably different from that had by other house servants. Even though he interprets this strange difference in terms of something inherent to him ("He was not a normal houseboy" (HYS 17 emphasis mine)), we see instead a projection onto himself of a radical social philosophy (what Aunty designates as craziness) espoused by his employer. The validity of this deductive view of Odenigbo's philosophy hinges on the fact that insofar as Ugwu is not normal for not sleeping on the floor but on a conventional bed and is able to edify himself by reading and studying, then we are bound to trace backwards to Odenigbo's social ideals that are working counter class stratification norms. From this, another norm and therefore a shared worldview reveals itself. In Nigeria's class structure, it is clear that certain acts are not only privileges of the middle class, but the same must be preserved as markers of class distinction. The working class, as houseboys, ought "not to sleep on a bed in a room" but "on the kitchen floor". Inferentially, as far as they are houseboys, they are also not privileged to have formal education. When Olanna relates of how she had pleaded with her parents to accord their house servant, Maxwell, appreciation through gesture of greeting, they are disdainful:

None of them thanked Maxwell. Olanna wished they would; it was such a simple thing to do. To acknowledge the humanity of the people who served them. She had suggested it once; her father said he paid them good salaries, and her mother said thanking them would give them room to be insulting, while Kainene, as usual, said nothing, a bored expression on her face. (HYS 30).

Standing from Olanna's perspective, if humanity is marked and appreciated in simple a thing as a greeting gesture, then in the prevailing class-conscious Nigeria, this humanity is traded off with impersonal monetary value, in effect reducing the working class to their use value. In this context, "good salaries", whether Maxwell would admit this or whether this is Olanna's father's own unilateral estimation, is embraced as a sufficient impersonal stand-in and measure of humanity. Olanna's mother's response conveys a self-preserving attitude as a middle-class person contending with an existential need

to secure bourgeois respect and reputation through keeping social distance from Maxwell for the spuriously reason to pre-empt his insult. From the place where this lack of humanity is observed (suffice even to say that from the place from which this perceived inhumanity, sanitised within logics of class hierarchy, is perceptible at all) affirmation of humanity is so simple to practice, discounting the exchange value that money serves to convey. Familiar transparencies or the common sense by which class hierarchy is maintained is uncannily perceptible from this place (Olanna's egalitarian ethical standpoint) where observation is launched. Olanna's former lover, Mohammed's, observation about her transformed way of seeing things reinforces this view of her egalitarian ideals: "Sometimes you are just like the white people, the way they gawk at everyday things" (*HYS* 45). Mohammed's observation about Olanna explicatively extends our view that Olanna's credential as a returning migrant, socially located at the border zone, is facilitative not only of her perceptual capacity to determine dehumanising logic of Nigeria's class structure but has also engendered in her consciousness an acuity operative in her distinguishing the minutiae of humanity such as ordinary greetings. There is a profound consciousness about this being "like white people" awakened in her, bordering on offence, when Mohammed makes the comment. After a long lapse from the moment the comment is made, in which they meet and have a cordial exchange with his mother, Olanna appears have taken significant offence with it, almost muttering to herself: "I am not like white people,' she said quietly" (*HYS* 46). This prompts Mohamed to make a quick apology: "Mohammed glanced at her. "Of course you're not. You're a nationalist and a patriot..."(*HYS* 46). This is a strong indication of a deep-seated alienation pointing to having substantially spent time away from Nigeria. Her taking offence suggests a struggle to re-integrate in her society, hence the unexpected revelation that she is possibly Western in thought and taste occurs as a setback. As it will be shown in this chapter, this is also a working force in her resolute commitment to counterbalance bourgeois logic through the self-denial of a middle-class life that her parents want to force on her.<sup>55</sup> Corroborated in this are prevalent attitudes about class hierarchy of which Olanna and Odenigbo, as Americannah, manifest a non-sanctioning temperament, standing out as aberrant relative to the logic of class consciousness which they have to contend with.

Disavowal of bourgeois life, which attaches to its membership a conditional requirement to recognize and propagate social inequality, is most unequivocally epitomized in Olanna's contrastive focalisation

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<sup>55</sup>This latter claim will be demonstrated in the next section as attention turns to the examination of remitted systems of practice.

of her immediate family's bourgeois lot and her Uncle Mbaezi's family's simple life, unencumbered by stilted hypocrisies of class consciousness and machinations. More than any other episode, these two familial contexts throw into sharp relief her mental topography concerning Nigeria's class ideals. Incidentally the two locations avail contrastive contexts by which to determine Olanna's social ideology in the way they are juxtaposed in the narrative. In the narrative, the scene at which Chief Okonji, the finance minister, is being hosted ostensibly for a dinner by her parents, provides the most significant context in which her repudiation of bourgeois life is lucidly registered. When her mother enters Olanna's room to ask her to join the company at the dinner table, the report of her mother's speech is presented in free indirect speech mode that leaves no doubt about the significance her parents attach to her presence at the table: "But her mother came into her room to ask her to *please* join them; it was not every day that they hosted the finance minister, and this dinner was even more important because of the building contract her father wanted" (HYS 30 emphasis added). A note of plea introduced by the italicized word performs a double function. First it alerts us of her mother's worry that Olanna is prone to fail to appear for the dinner. Secondly, it indicates that Olanna is conscious of the power she has to decide whether to honour her mother or not, for in the initial statement preceding this free indirect speech, we are informed that she had decided not to attend the dinner.

The beseeching note of her mother thus indicates a frustrating firmness on the part of Olanna. As Simpson avers, such free indirect speech "displays varying degrees of freedom and directness depending on how much of the flavour of the original speech a writer wishes to convey" (21). Since interest here is on the focalising agent instead of the writer, considering the narrative statement that precedes the free indirect report of her mother's speech, the figural medium exercises a degree of freedom in conveying the sense that the coming of her mother into her room is undesired: "Olanna had not wanted to have dinner with her parents, especially since they had invited Chief Okonji. *But her mother came into her room ....*(HYS 30 emphasis added)" The figural medium retains the directness of her mother's speech by not substituting the word "please", a key element underscoring the value she (the mother) attaches to Olanna's presence at the table. Her mother's anxiety, as revealed in the free indirect speech, that the minister has honoured the family by his visit and also that he is expected to award her father a building contract, is heightened by an obstinacy on Olanna's part. Immediately ensuing after the free indirect speech, there is a deliberate move to present the mother's speech in direct speech: "*Biko*, wear something nice. Kainene will be dressing up, too,' her mother had added, as if mentioning her twin

sister would somehow legitimize everything.” If the note of plea in the free indirect speech as against Olanna’s righteous obstinacy presents Olanna’s mother as pitifully desperate, the fastidious figure cut in the latter’s verbatim persuasion of Olanna to dress up as well as her sister, is rendered absurd in the foregrounded epistemic modality.<sup>56</sup> The comparator in the reporting clause “as if mentioning her twin sister would somehow legitimize everything” conveys, first, a righteous rejection of every possible justification for doing what she is required to do, namely to acquiesce to her parents’ demands to sexually liaise with Chief Okonji as a boost in her father’s angling for a government contract. Secondly, it conveys an ethical renouncement of mistaken legitimacy of “everything” that not even a possible endorsement from her sister whom she respects for her enigmatic independence, may minimally salvage.

It is worthy to also observe that throughout this scene Olanna remains frosty and unapproachable, minimally participating in the conversation. The only few instances when she makes verbal or facial cues are to express what she knows goes counter to the expectations of those present or to express stark sarcasm. She cordially greets and smiles at Maxwell, the steward, who is the odd one out for being from the working class. Only when she is compelled to speak, as the minister deliberately engages her with a question which elicits considerable laughter, but to which she merely replies “It’s very good” without any embellishing elaboration considering the amiable atmosphere at the table. Instead of an appropriate narrative report of a speech act (for instance “she said”, or “she said, laughing”), there is a narrative report of action followed by a narrative report of an acerbic thought establishing a disconnect between what she says and what she thinks: “It’s very good.’ Olanna looked up. There was something wet about Chief Okonji’s smile” (HYS 30). In response to the minister’s offer of work at his ministry, she only speaks out with a calculated aim to stun the anxious company: “*Olanna placed her spoon down. ‘I’ve decided to go to Nsukka. I’ll be leaving in two weeks’*” (HYS 31 emphasis added). Her laying down the spoon smacks of one preparing for a resolute intention to cause maximal upset to the minister’s and her parents’ expectation that, as a daughter and young beautiful woman<sup>57</sup>, she would acquiesce to their demands. In Chief Okonji’s observation “...You’ve been staring at it as if it is something that bites” (HYS 30) is the deictic indicator “you’ve been” showing either she is absorbed in her own

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<sup>56</sup>Simpson outlines epistemic modality as “concerned with the speaker’s confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed”(44).

<sup>57</sup>Kainene hints at Olanna’s beauty as reason why the latter is targeted as sex bait: “The ten percent is standard, so extras always help. The other bidders probably don’t have a *beautiful* daughter” (HYS 35 emphasis in the original).

thought or is uninterested in the conversation or riled by the entire dinner arrangement and only maintaining some decorum. After Chief Okonji's joke about Olanna's aloofness and upon offering the brief response, there is an immediate lapse into what Manfred Jahn terms "offline perception" (sec.N3.2.13) wherein Olanna's caustic attitude towards the Chief's figure is revealed ("It's very good.' Olanna looked up. *There was something wet about Chief Okonji's smile*"). There is, therefore, predominantly an indication that as the focaliser, Olanna is not just bored with political subterfuge and related horse-trading, but she displays a sense that these are unpardonable transgressions bedevilling women and the Nigerian nation, and must be countered. A contention can, however, arise that Olanna is racked by ennui. When note is taken of her warm feelings towards the steward, Maxwell, this claim finds no convincing justification. The position taken here is that, as an Americanah, she is the more easily discountenanced by normalised illegitimacies (to use the narrator's word of choice) referred to by Mohammed (her old lover) as "everyday things" (HYS 45).

If Olanna holds a deprecating attitude towards bourgeois banalities, she evinces a desire for an alternative social relation based on equality and mutual respect. This is implied in how communal life is focalised at Kano when Olanna goes visiting the Mbaezis. Even before the contrastive focalisation of life and living at Uncle Mbaezi's, there is already a hint within the dinner context as to what Olanna's ideals regarding the problem of social hierarchy are. Through the figure of Maxwell, there is an indictment of the stifling and absurd bourgeois impositions on the working class, symbolically represented in the stiff uniform he must wear as a steward: "His white uniform was starched so stiff his trousers looked as if they had been made out of cardboard" (HYS 30). Again the comparator in this observation, signalling to the governing epistemic modality in the context, expresses a disparaging interrogativeness about the degree of propriety demanded of Maxwell as a domestic worker. The hyperbole effect of the comparator leaves no doubt that this demand is perceived as a choking excess bordering on absurdity. The epistemic modality, as Simpson argues, confers on the narrative an impression of alienation (53). This is the alienation perceptible in the two significant comparators examined above. This sense of alienation, however, is not limited to these two features in the episode. Whenever there is laughter about which a report of speech act is given, this sense of alienation is also registered. When Chief Okonji attempts a joke about his cook prompted her parents laugh, the narrative report of it conveys a perceiver aesthetically at variance with the three: "Her parents cackled loudly. Olanna was not sure how that was funny, but then it was the minister's joke" (HYS 32). In the



comparator “as if mentioning her sister somehow legitimized everything” points to her alienation from the operative logic that she should sexually avail herself in service of her father’s and the finance minister’s interests. The second comparator points to an uncanny perception of the ridiculous treatment that domestic servants have to go through in bourgeois households. On the other hand in the report that Olanna was uncertain of Chief Okonji’s joke’s merits, marked by the modal lexical verb phrase “was not sure”, is to indicate an aesthetic outsider status. These superficial forms of perceptible alienation, however, do not present as resulting from Olanna’s naivety or artlessness but from the opposite of this. She finds the minister’s joke flat because in her calculation, this does not merit the status of a joke, whereas the steward’s attire and her mother’s requirement that she dresses up for the sake of the minister’s and father’s interests are deductively things she has outgrown.

There presents an ideological social orientation in how her visit and stay at Kano is focalised, as an alternative to bourgeois life from which she has feelings of alienation. As it will be shown, however, she occupies an in-between location, with the bourgeois life into which she was born and brought up, on one hand, and the flourishing, down-to-earth communal life at Kano to which she is drawn, on the other, but to which she does not belong by virtue of birth nor by upbringing. This recapitulates the argument presented in the previous chapter that Olanna’s sense of alienation from both worlds has engendered in her consciousness a “conflictual yet productive space in which the arbitrariness of the sign of cultural signification emerges within the regulated boundaries of social discourse” (Bhabha 172). As it is argued here, her migrant background accounts for this critical alienation from the bourgeois sensibility. It is from third space which she occupies that the bourgeois culture uncannily becomes visible as a socially alienating pretension and the down-to-earth communal life presents as an attractive alternative. As argued at the start of this chapter, this threshold experience points to Olanna’s migrant background. Against Mohammed’s disclosure that her way of seeing was “just like the white people”, it is more valid to make this contention than to attribute it to an exclusively Nigerian provenance. To observe that her way of seeing aligns with that of white people, a nominal reference to the Western modern worldview, suggests Olanna’s conspicuously radical attitude. As a social critic and as a social practitioner (this will be examined shortly), Olanna exhibits to an appreciable degree an erratic worldview, pertinent in whose construction is her stint in United Kingdom.

Considering Mohammed's recognition of Olanna's alien way of seeing the Nigerian quotidian, therefore, permits a look at what she makes of communal dynamics at Uncle Mbaezi's. From the moment she arrives at her uncle's stall, the narrative is predominated by what Simpson classifies as "words denoting thoughts, feelings and perception" (*verba sentiendi*) (35), foregrounding a figural narrative situation. There is also a preponderance of objective observations highlighted by generic sentences. Where *verbasentiendi* occur they signal her fascination with the setting, whereas objective observation and generic sentences convey a sense of allure of simplicity and unaffected practicality:

It was break time and the schoolyard was full of children. Boys were playing football in different teams on the same field, so that multiple balls flew in the air; Olanna wondered how they could tell which ball was which. Clusters of girls were closer to the road, playing *oga* and *swell*, clapping rhythmically as they hopped first on one leg and then the other. (HYS 38)

This is a description of a scene in a school compound built through the initiatives of an ethnic Igbo at Kano, whose children are said to be marginalised in Nigeria's northern schools. The first sentence appreciates the first simple fact about the school that it is thriving despite the odds stacked against the community in the form of ethnic marginalisation. There is thus a note of pride in the simplicity of the statement which is augmented, ironically, by the second sentence. From the understood rules of football, there ought to be one team per football pitch, but that the boys can afford to have fun at all playing football, downplays the possible absurdity contemplated in different teams sharing one pitch. Similarly, girls have room to exercise themselves. Even the instance of epistemic modality in the sentence "Olanna *wondered* how they could tell which ball was which" rather than indicating an indicting scepticism, has the opposite effect of expressing awe for the practicality of the school facility as a dividend of the oppressed community's sheer determination. But this admiration is not confined to the perception of the community's unremitting assertion of their dignity and humanity against marginalisation, an admiration which, one may argue, arises from the mere association of this community's struggle with her lover's (Odenigbo's) anti-oppression stance. More than this, however, from her perceptual angle, there is an engrossment with simplicities inherent to the community's occupations and relations yet in which there are reflections of a thriving life insulated from ill-will, pretensions and the alienating necessities of class consciousness. Tracing Olanna's movement behind her aunt as the latter closes shop and leads the way to the Sabon Gari communal compound, the focus of her attention affirms Mohammed's remark about her gaze at minutiae:

She pulled down the wooden shutters of the kiosk, covering the neatly arranged cases of matches, chewing gum, sweets, cigarettes, and detergent, and then picked up Olanna's bag and led the way into the yard. The narrow bungalow was unpainted. The clothes hung out to dry were still, stiff, as if desiccated by the hot afternoon sun. Old car tyres, the ones children played with, were piled under the *kuka* tree. Olanna knew the tranquil flatness of the yard would change soon, when the children came back from school. The families would leave doors open and the veranda and kitchen would fill with chatter. Uncle Mbaezi's family lived in two rooms. (HYS 39)

The painstaking but unqualified inventorying of goods in her aunt's shop highlights the petty trade she is involved in. Attention does not linger on the pettiness of the trade, however, but it immediately shifts, again without lingering, to the residence of the Mbaezis, the clothes hanging out to dry and the vibrancy of children understood from play items left in the yard. Subsequent sweeping observation of the same compound scene, presented in generic, parallel sentence structures reflect a consciousness attuned to naturalness:

Aunty Ifeka walked casually towards a brown hen, grasped it quickly, and handed it to Arize to kill in the yard. They sat outside the kitchen while Arize plucked it and Aunty Ifeka blew the chaff from rice. A neighbour was boiling corn, and once in a while, when the water frothed over, the stove fire hissed. Children were playing in the yard now, raising white dust, shouting. A fight broke out under the *kuka* tree, and Olanna heard a child scream at another in Igbo, 'Your mother's pussy!' (HYS 40).

Through the observing eye, there is no attempt to analytically delve beneath what is observed, complemented in the simplicity of the sentences and marking a contentment with surface naturalness. An expletive 'Your mother's pussy!' ordinarily offensive, does not provoke curiosity that would have seen the observer or hypothetically any other person within earshot take offence with the young child's resort to the denigrating insult. Coming at the posterior of the train of observations, and without register of offence or curiosity in the observer or any other person in the vicinity, it gives the impression that its offensiveness is taken to be diffused, suggestive of the absence of rankling animosity, or that such swearwords are tolerated. There is also no indications of a sense of embarrassment or submission to feelings of deprivation in the Ijaw woman whom Arize derides behind her back because "all her family eats every day is stockfish" (HYS 41). This quick cataloguing of the yard reflect a voracious and covetous attention to that which the community accomplishes as commonplace, what Mohammed terms "everyday things" though which come to her as covetable. The unqualified note that families in this Sabon Gari communal compound have doors wide open and the indication that the kitchen is shared symbolically captures the unpretentious openness in the community, yearningly contemplated in the clause "and the veranda and kitchen would fill with chatter". Distinctions that may suggest hierarchy

are non-existent. Against the inventoried simplicity of the community's needs (Ifeka's shop's stock suggests the range of these needs: matches, chewing gum, sweets, cigarettes and detergents), the smallness and unaffectedness of the living quarters (narrow, unpainted bungalow), and the old but useful playthings for children, the thriving conversations that engulf the yard bestows on the community a sense of contentment. This is not to suggest that, necessarily, the community itself is living in perfect contentment, nor to suggest that the thriving sense of communal geniality is necessarily perfect. What is maintained is that Olanna's perceptual orientation configures these communal dynamics to project a quasi-idyllic portrait of this community's way of life.

The imagined contentment finds embodiment in her ebullient cousin, Arize, who epitomizes the vitalizing nurture of idealized Sabon Gari communal life. From the body language, Olanna speculates that Arize's world is wrapped in harmony and that although this may be upset once in a while, the communal milieu abounds in a revitalising spirit and beneficence arising from the human bond in it:

Arize was laughing. Her plump body, her round arms, shook as she laughed. Olanna held her close. She felt that things were in order, the way they were meant to be, and that even if they tumbled down once in a while, in the end they would come back together again. This was why she came to Kano: this lucid peace. (HYS 39)

Aunty Ifeka and Uncle Mbaezi on the other hand encapsulate for her this beneficence that suffuses the community's apparent well-being. From both their freehearted offer of their bed to Olanna and Ifeka's unsparing slaughter of chicken even where frugality rationally should be instinctive, to Abdulmalik's unstinting offer to her of free pair of slippers,<sup>58</sup> there effuses a stream of fond-feeling from which it is inferable that they have become memorable markers of her visits:

When Aunty Ifeka's eyes began to dart around the yard, *she knew* it was in search of a suitable chicken. Aunty Ifeka always killed one when she visited, even if it was the last she owned, sauntering around the yard, its feathers marked with a splash of red paint to distinguish it

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<sup>58</sup>Significantly, in the projection of the entire Sabon Gari, the predominant modality is deontic and boulomaic modalities; however the presentation of Abdulmalik's figure is virtually the only moment when there is a shift to epistemic modality, expressing less of admiration and more of alienation from him:

He opened his bag and brought out a pair of slippers and held them out to her, his narrow face creased in a smile, his teeth stained with kola nut and tobacco and *whatever else Olanna did not know*, stains of varying shades of yellow and brown. *He looked as if* it were he who was receiving a gift; he had that expression of people who marveled at education with calm certainty that it would never be theirs. (HYS 40)

This is also the only major description in this context in which the focalizing agent observantly lingers on a character's details. This alienating projection anticipates Abdulmalik's role in the killing of the Mbaezis during the anti-Igbo wave after the coup.

from the neighbours' chickens, which had bits of cloths tied to their wings or paint of different colour. Olanna no longer protested about the chicken, just as she no longer protested when Uncle Mbaezi and Auntie Ifeka slept on the mats, next to the many relatives who always seemed to be staying with them, so that she could have their bed.(HYS 39-40)

The *verbasentiendi* "she knew" indicates Olanna takes it as a matter of course that her aunt is unhesitatingly generous. The sentence structures, especially the last two, cascade from a basic proposition into diminutive details, mimicking an overwhelming outflow of fondness, as if the particular details (the colours and pieces of cloths on the chicken, sleeping mats, adjacency of the sleeping hosts to the many sleeping relatives) must be enumerated as vital beacons of the memorable acts of uninhibited selflessness.

The idyllic imagination of the Sabon Gari community is not, however, merely confined to its greed-free existence. As already detailed above, the question of ethnic integration as one of the anticipated problematics of the narrative discourse, registers first as an ambivalence, with Olanna espousing the strategy of amicable persuasion of the Northerners whereas the Igbo community members prefer a bolder alternative of establishing their own school. In resonance with her idyllic imagination, however, Olanna projects an aspiration for ethnic integration through linguistic interpenetration. She is filled with admiration for Mbaezis' multilingual fluency in Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, casting her own fluency in Latin and French as a mark of alienation (see HYS 40-41).

As they go to sleep at night on the first day of her visit to Kano, more contrasts become starker. Since the whole family share a room, partitioned with a thin curtain, this invokes an uncanny awareness of the different set-up at her home in Lagos. As the narrative transitions to this Lagos set-up, the matter-of-fact, generic sentence that characterised the preceding narration become minimal as longer, less matter-of-fact and structurally more complex ones predominate, lending the episode a brooding sense. This marks the drift of Ifemelu's consciousness towards the life in Lagos that, as we have shown, she detests for its "artificiality" (HYS 43) mostly epitomised by her parents. Triggered by a contemplation of her hosts' sex life in the shared room, Olanna's consciousness drifts back to that of her parents. Of importance here is the manner and significance in which this set up is narratively rendered rather than her parents' sex life, *per se*, for this manner avails to us the meanings and value she attaches to these different set ups:

But she had always been separated from them by hallways that got longer and more thickly carpeted as they moved from house to house. When they moved to their present home, with its ten rooms, her parents chose different bedrooms for the first time. 'I need the whole wardrobe, and it will be nice to have your father visit!' her mother had said. But the girlish laugh had not rung true for Olanna. The artificiality of her parents' relationship always seemed harder, more shaming, when she was here in Kano. (*HYS* 43)

In the first sentence, the spaciousness of the house marked by separating long hallways is felt as effecting isolation, sundering or seclusion rather than serving the practical purpose of affording a comfortable space. The adverb "always" adds the impression that this separation is perceived as prescribed, infinite captivity, as the hallway walls symbolically evoke. In the succeeding sentence, this isolation and seclusion effect is affirmed in the revelation that her parents have many bedrooms where each can spend the night away from the other. The interposed clause, purporting to supply a trifling detail elaborating the subordinate clause, subversively lends an inane quality to the main clause at the end of the sentence. This inanity is carried on in the choice to have her mother declare verbatim the meaning they attach to spaciousness of their home (so that her husband can go visiting her in her room, a hyperbolic indication of the spaciousness of the home). Here we witness a view of one driven by excess and the other driven by practical necessity. Where at her home in Lagos she is surrounded and determined by excess which means, ironically, she is confronted by a sense of captivity, in Kano life is encompassed and dictated by practicality which as she admits motivates her going there: "This was why she came to Kano: this lucid peace" (*HYS* 39).

If we collate this preference for practicality with her value for a thriving, fundamental human relations, including such simple gestures as exchange of greetings (as in the case of Maxwell, their steward), together with her warm treatment of Ugwu (an illiterate, poor, houseboy, sharply contrasting with her as an educated woman of bourgeois background), a picture of her social compass emerges. As Rimmon-Kenan persuasively contends "[a] character may represent an ideological position through his way of seeing the world or his [or her] behaviour in it" (82). Against this assertion, Olanna's differential way of seeing the two settings opens a view of her sociological orientation. Practicality in human relations would suggest the dissolution of the alienating class identity, and relations there from, in preference for relations in which bare humanity in the patterns of these relations takes precedence. As shown above, her bourgeois identity requires her family to hierarchically maintain social distance from those below them. This raises questions of alienation as a product of class consciousness, indicating Olanna's Marxian leanings. As dictated to by class constraints, their bourgeois upbringing has unwittingly resulted

in an inexorable advance into alienation, away from sociality as fundamental human nature (Dai 138). Therefore, in their alienation, as Dai puts it, they “are estranged from human nature so that they live in the way they are not themselves in nature” (138). By working to maintain class status, through legitimate and illegitimate means, her parents have been driven to the extent that themselves are alienated from the humanity of those around them, including their own children since for him to accumulate even more capital he has to see his own daughter (Olanna) as an object that can enter into circulation as a commodity exchangeable with other object commodities (such as building contracts) or as a supplement to monetary value (he sexually offers her to the finance minister as a boost to the ten percent kick-back he expected to pay the finance minister for the awarding of the contract).<sup>59</sup> As such in Olanna’s father’s eyes, she is an “[object] of economic value” (Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* 3) that can then be exchanged with other commodities in circulation. In the two’s (Olanna’s father and her mother’s) eyes if the steward is worth any value, it is the value of the sum of money they pay him, rather than his human essence. Capital accumulation, through corrupt means, that enables propagation of their class identity has thus engendered their alienation from humanity. As Lutz reminds us:

Although it appears as a thing that, to the extent that it gives the individuals who possess it social power, promises complete human freedom, capital is in fact a moment in a social process that operates independently of human subjects and comes to dominate every aspect of their existence. (421)

Put in vulgar terms, the capital has divested the Ozobias of humanity by means of the capitalist symbolic order that is epitomised in the Nigeria of *HYS*. With this mention of capitalist symbolic order, we establish a linkage with Bhabha’s offer that the border crossing experience produces a necessary disjunction in identification thus inducing the productive space of liminality where familiar transparencies and the entire identification that the symbolic order (in this case capitalist logic) affords are thrown into sharp relief, rendering them objects of liminal migrant’s objectifying gaze, and therefore the possibility of critique (47). In considering Olanna’s differential attitude to Lagos and Kano social realities, therefore, “alienation is viewed as a mistake, a defect that needs to be corrected by other processes” (Ollman cited in Dai 138). This is the subject of the next section as focus turns on the praxis dimension of Olanna’s sociological orientation. From the above premises also, it is determinable that Odenigbo’s perceived idiosyncrasy as an Americanah lies in the nature of social ideals he espouses,

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<sup>59</sup> Olanna’s sister taunts her thus: “‘Ten percent is standard, so extras always help. The other bidders probably don’t have a *beautiful* daughter’” (*HYS* 35 emphasis in the original)



particularly pertaining to class hierarchy as one among those inequalities and injustices attending Nigeria's post-independence reality.

We return here to Ugwu, first considering the role he plays as part of *HYS* narrative discourse, aside from his part as a focalising agent, and the rationale behind Adichie's choice of him (a houseboy of a poor background as well as an illiterate) to document the Biafra catastrophe through the "metatext" (Akpome, 'Focalisation and Polyvocality' 26, 34) titled "The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died". A look at this symbolic role will pave way for a better elucidation of his focalisation function. As an entry point to describing this symbolic role, we revisit Olanna's and Odenigbo's fundamental political desire underlying their common rooting for anon-alienating social and political dispensation.<sup>60</sup> If their ideals and values privilege a centering of the marginalised within the Biafran and Nigerian political economy, it would be necessary to see Ugwu as a strategic symbolic choice that would cater for the agenda of rendering Biafra story through an "earthiness" (*HYS* 37–38) of perspective, one freed from bourgeois pretensions.<sup>61</sup> Being illiterate, young and rural also imply that he is the preferable medium in which values, ideals and practices remitted through his tutelary relations with Odenigbo and Olanna may easily take root because as a young child he is relatively more impressionable. As detailed above, Ugwu is also a unique rural character because, unlike Harrison and Jomo (the former is culturally alienated, only preferring things associated with Whiteness such as food, and the latter is his opposite in being rigidly traditional) he is not yet ideologically, politically and sociologically fixated to any orientation. For this reason his way of seeing as we will demonstrate in his focalisation function is adaptable, making him an apt conduit for social remittance as inculcations from Olanna and Odenigbo. Here we will trace how he develops his political, social and ideological orientation under the tutelary auspices of her employers, Odenigbo and Olanna, as a way of showing that this development is justifiably a form and process in social remittance.

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<sup>60</sup> The circumstances of the beginnings of romantic relationship between Odenigbo and Olanna are telling enough of the central problem of *HYS*. The start of their love relationship does not present as arbitrary union, but that dictated by the overarching imperatives of the narrative. While queuing for plane tickets at Ibadan, the ticket seller, acting out racial complex, accords preferential treatment to a white customer. Odenigbo's furious confrontation of the ticket seller catches Olanna's attention and is instantly endeared to him (*HYS* 28–29).

<sup>61</sup> As Olanna reflects on the diametric difference between her mother and Uncle Mbaezi, she admits that central reason for her admiration of the latter was because of "an earthiness about him" by which she denotes his down-to-earth social spirit.

As background to deliberating on Ugwu's role in the matrix of social remittance process to be explored here, it is necessary to sketch the import of narrating the Biafra war experience to and on behalf of powerless victims within the story world of blanket atrocities committed in the name of the opposing interests that inform the war. If we lend the story in *HYS* a hypothetical factuality, (that is assuming the events described in it happened in reality exactly as presented in the novel), and considering the degree of the graphic and ugly atrocity contemplated, it would be vital to provide for a process and means of commemorating it in a way divested of competing hegemonic class interests. A gesture at the invaluable social location of the exercise of commemoration is bequeathed to the narrative by means of the metatext "The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died" revealed at the end of the novel as a book authored by Ugwu. The effectiveness of this strategic integration of fictionality and factuality lies in the book's quasi-factuality, where fictional character in the fictional world morphs into factualistic locus so as to immortalise the horror that he survives only narrowly within that nightmarish fictional universe. But Adichie calculates that it would not be any character that would so morph from fictional universe to a factualistic one. It will be recalled that the bourgeois (represented by Olanna's parents) evaded atrocities of the war by fleeing abroad. Arguably, only the poor and the committed thus remained behind either to fight for a just cause or as hapless victims of atrocity. The choice of Ugwu as a suitable author of post-Biafra atrocity augurs well with the need to capture the authentic voice of the victims. But since most of these victims were illiterate or too poor, I contend here that one way in which Adichie treats this narrative dilemma is through intellectual rehabilitation of Ugwu's lot by bringing into play processes of social remittance, subtly transpiring through what Carling terms remittance script(221). Such a character, as will be shown shortly in focusing on the growth of Ugwu's ethical consciousness, will be one whose perspective resonates with the "normative system" of the text, to borrow Uspensky's and Rimmon-Kenan's phrase (Uspensky 8; Rimmon-Kenan 81).

Memory and memorialisation of this ugliness as *HYS*'s *raison d'être*, is discursively presented as a necessary obligation for everyone including the non-literate (like Ugwu) and the eponymous "world" (as synecdochic reference to humanity) that Ugwu in the book censures for its apathy towards the plight of Biafra war victims.<sup>62</sup> As one of Chinua Achebe's literary progeny, specifically in relation to the memory and memorialisation of the Biafra experience, Adichie adapts the last three lines of the former's

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<sup>62</sup>In "Author's Note" immediately after the end of the novel, Adichie recalls her parents' refrain to the (Biafra) stories they narrated to her and seminal in the writing of *HYS*: "war is very ugly". (*HYS*, see. Author's Note)

poem “Mango Seedling” for the narrative’s epigraph as a subtle indication of an objective to further the memory and memorialisation of the Biafra experience. The poem itself presents a mango seedling vying for survival in adverse conditions, a symbolic scenario and figure that align with that of the personality to whom the poem is dedicated (Christopher Okigbo). In what evokes the motif of memorialising in the present, the poem is enveloped by an atmosphere racked by pensive and traumatic sombreness: <sup>63</sup>

Today I see it still –  
Dry wire-thin in the sun and dust of the dry months –  
Headstone on tiny debris of passionate courage. (quoted in  
*HYS* no page)

In order to determine the import we are required to bestow to the *HYS* text with respect to Biafra commemoration, Genette’s concept of paratext is pertinent. Genette avers that a “text rarely appears in its naked state without reinforcement and accompaniment” be they in the form of preface, author’s name, text’s title or illustrations in the text in question (‘Introduction to the Paratext’ 261). These elements which environ the text, Genette argues, conditions how the text ought to be received and consumed as a text offering “to anyone and everyone the possibility of either entering or of turning back” on the text (‘Introduction to the Paratext’ 261). Paratext, Genette continues, is defined by intentionality attributed to the authorial figure or “its allies” (suggesting the readership sanctioning presented normative system). In this respect, if we consider Adichie’s “Author’s Note” at the end of the novel, together with the epigraph, it permits an approach to *HYS* as an exercise in commemoration. Adichie concludes the note with the call “[m]ay we always remember”, giving indication, therefore, of the kind of interpretive weight we are required to put on the narrative as far as its import is concerned. With respect to the commitment of re-storing collective histories, as one of the main pre-occupations of *HYS*, I contend that this memorialising is not to be taken for granted as an act that any character has the ability (rather than capacity) to undertake notwithstanding their attributes.<sup>64</sup> This is to suggest that regardless of whether the character is literate (as the condescending Professor Ezeka (*HYS* 51), or is suited but well-meaning expatriates as Richard, is victim of war

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<sup>63</sup>Still in Adichie’s “Author’s Note” she leaves a note of what narrative discourse in the novel is intended to bequeath us: “May we always remember” (*HYS*, see. Author’s Note)

<sup>64</sup>I distinguish these two terms, “ability” and “capacity”, for strategic interpretive reason. As the word “ability” derives from the adjective “able” it suggests a running competence; “capacity” derives from the adjective “capable” which suggests a potential that, subject to institution of certain conditions, may lead to realization of ability. For this reason, as Ugwu enters Odenigbo’s service he has the capacity of “innate intelligence” as noted by his teacher and we also know from aunt’s admission that he has the capacity to “learn everything fast” (*HYS* 4, 84).

atrocities, is a perpetrator of atrocities, and even less so is illiterate (as Harrison who is inclined to things he supposes as European and American rather than the quotidian realities of Nigeria and Biafra (*HYS* 72-73)), the narrative discourse privileges that such a character needs to be one with a certain capacity to accomplish the act memorialising. In the chapter the ability to accomplish this responsibility is shown to be particularly realized in Ugwu through an intricate process that bears the hallmarks of social remittance.

The first impressions of Ugwu is of a child lacking in worldly discernment and nuanced judgement with respect to social and political context that confronts him in his new work environment at Odenigbo's. It is maintained here that this lack of discernment and nuanced judgement is only in regard of Nigeria's postcolonial predicament that, as we have explored above, Odenigbo and Olanna epitomize, rather than with regard to his traditional Igbo set-up. Though he exhibits a comfortable command of normative system in the latter cultural set-up, this is seen as antiquated by Olanna and Odenigbo. To mark this attitude, Odenigbo severally scolds Ugwu as an "ignoramus" (see for example *HYS* 14). On the other hand, Olanna is calmly unperturbed by Ugwu's superstitious impulsion when a lizard suddenly appears as they are rearranging photographs in Odenigbo's house, an indication of her perception that the traditional beliefs about lizards to which Ugwu subscribes are inconsequential, just as she finds the superstitious belief in charms also as triviality (see *HYS* 48, 104-05, 241-42). Lack of discernment is thus not with respect to cultural matters but with respect to the critical values and norms (central to present Nigeria predicaments) offered in *HYS* narrative discourse as espoused by Odenigbo and Olanna, and approached here as social remittance content. As an entry point to expatiating on Ugwu's lack of discernment concerning the pressing social, political and ideological dynamics at his work place, and how he develops this, it is vital to consider Rimmon-Kenan's distinction of what she terms facets in focalisation (77-83). This will enable a general characterisation of Ugwu's focalising functions, in terms of his mental status and how this status progresses as the narrative unfolds. Rimmon-Kenan's typological distinctions facilitates a trace of progress in Ugwu's evaluative capacity, to use Uspensky's phrase for ideological point of view (8). With the idea of a focalisation facet, Rimmon-Kenan deflects from the question of who is focalising and the other question of relations between the focalising agent and the story, so as to explore questions of focalisation content character.<sup>65</sup> This enables her to

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<sup>65</sup> Different narratologists have developed their perspectives on focalisation on any of these two criteria. Stanzel arrives at his typology of focalisation (authorial narrative situation, figural narrative situation and first person narrative situation) on

distinguish between the perceptual facet (by which she encompasses focalisation content at level of sense data such as seeing, tasting and smelling, as well as memory), psychological facet (“the cognitive and the emotive orientation of the focalizer towards the focalized” (79)), and ideological facet (a concurrence with Uspensky’s definition of ideological point of view as “a general system of viewing the world conceptually” or the determining “normative system” in the narrative discourse (Rimmon-Kenan 81; Uspensky 8)). I contend here that two indications of Ugwu’s lack of discernment and nuanced judgement are evidenced by the focalisation facet by which his experience is conveyed. This is to suggest that in the part of the narrative temporally marked as “The Early Sixties”, Ugwu’s experience of his circumstances largely portrays Rimmon-Kenan’s description of perceptual and psychological focalisation facets which bespeak an absence of the ability to grasp astutely the intricate social, political and ideological constraints determining his identity as an Igbo and Nigerian. To Odenigbo and Olanna, as Americanah imbued with the political desire to raise a consciousness about this determining dynamics, Ugwu presents as a symbolic human project in which this consciousness is to be aroused. In this part of the narrative, therefore, he is pre-occupied with what he can see, feel, remember or parochially accomplish.

For the exercise of articulating the absence of an ideological compass, attention will concentrate here on those instances in the narrative charged with ethical connotations (be it political, ideological, or social). It is only by this limited focus that his ethical naivety can stand out against the background of ethical constraints within the context. Nowhere is this foregrounded more than in his first interaction with his new employer, Odenigbo, where the latter quasi-soliloquizes about the American and Belgian imperial conquests in Zaire and as he counsels him on how to approach school lessons in history (*HYS* 10–11). Evidently, Odenigbo’s rationale in this putative probing of Ugwu’s knowledge about the activities of the Belgians and Americans in Zaire is meant to gauge his grasp of Africa’s problematic position in global power configuration. Ugwu’s responses are telling about this grasp: “‘Yes, sah,’ Ugwu said. He wanted Master to keep talking, so he could listen to the sonorous voice, the musical blend of English words in his Igbo sentences” (*HYS* 10). Evidently the central focus of his consciousness

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the basis of who matters as the orienting consciousness in the narrative (Cohn 162). Genette bases his typology on the question of position or angle relative to the story so that there is external focalisation (the determining focal angle exists outside the story; internal focalisation where focal agent exists within the story world; zero focalisation in case of omniscience (*Narrative Discourse* 189-90). Bal dwells on “levels of focalisation” by which she suggests a kaleidoscopic conception of focalisation (157-58).

deflects from what Odenigbo sees as problem of imperialism to an immediate parochial problem of perceptually savouring what appears to him as the singularity of the context, namely Odenigbo's mastery of the English language. This perceptual glee transforms into apprehension (again informed by narrow-minded, immediate impulse) when Odenigbo uses an analogy to reinforce what he perceives as the gist in the Belgians' and Americans' involvement in the killing of Lumumba, the Zairean independence leader:

'You are my houseboy,' Master said. 'If I order you to go and beat a woman walking on the street with a stick, and then you give her a bloody wound on her leg, who is responsible for the wound, you or me?'

Ugwu stared at Master, shaking his head wondering if Master was referring to the chicken pieces in some roundabout way. (HYS 10)

This instance precedes Ugwu's stuffing his pocket with cooked chicken meat after which he is carried away by sleeping in his room with the pieces of meat still in the pocket. Odenigbo soon discovers this leaving Ugwu with the guilt of it. From the excerpt, the meaning of the analogy is lost to him but he could only attempt a comprehension it in terms of what he is immediately guilty of. Odenigbo's subsequent loud musing about the value of education in the struggle for African liberation from imperialism again prompts Ugwu's perceptual response:

'Education is a priority. How can we resist exploitation if we don't have the tools to understand exploitation?'

'Yes, sahl?' Ugwu nodded vigorously. He was determined to appear as alert as he could, because of the wild shine that had appeared in Master's eyes. (HYS 11)

Justification for remaining alert is premised on what can be perceived through sight rather than through penetrating intellectual operation. Ugwu's grasp of Odenigbo's visual language ("the wild shine" in his eyes, connoting a an optimistic delight that imperialistic exploitation and subjugation can possibly be countered through education) is confined to its surface significance, namely that his statement, *qua* statement, has seemingly put him in a good mood, an agreeable end that motivates Ugwu's service, especially now that he has been found to have hoarded roasted-chicken meat. A similar pattern of response, precipitating a sense of interpersonal impasse in Odenigbo, is staged through the Scottish explorer Mungo Park's adventure and its imperial significance in Africa. Citing Park's adventure putatively billed in school history texts as one who discovered river Niger, Odenigbo intends to convey the fractured epistemological universe of the postcolonial world and the necessity of re-writing history

to capture an Afro-centric perspective. From his agitated posture, it is clear that the existing school curricula of the early sixties Nigeria claim for European adventurers in Africa a prerogative status, something he wants Ugwu to be wary about:

‘There are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land: the real answer and answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers .... They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park’s grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it was Mungo Park.’

‘Yes, sah.’ Ugwu wished that this person called Mungo Park had not offended Master so much.

‘Can’t you say anything else?’ (11)

Ugwu’s response is not history-aware. He can only conjecture existence of Mungo Park to the extent that he exists as an embodied human and who, as such, can be responsible for Odenigbo’s offence. Odenigbo’s agitation stems not from Mungo Park’s personal arrogation of the right to name but from the wider imperial significance of his individual acts. In Odenigbo’s way of seeing, it is no longer a question of what Park did but the meaning of his adventures within colonial and postcolonial discourse, where it amounts to colonial imperialism and thus calling for a countermove which he advises as strategic (learning “both answers”). As Ugwu is incapable of such a nuanced grasp of history, he can only contemplate the human person of Park whom he can then hold responsible not for the imperialist dispossession of the Africans’ claim to their geographical landscape, but for personally offending his Master. Ugwu’s view of Mungo Park is thus shorn of imperial understanding, sharply contrasting with his master’s. As seen before this exchange, the latter is profoundly piqued and absorbed in the glaring imperialism entailed in the activities of Europeans. This is why he feels that “[e]ducation is a priority” if only to counter imperial exploitation and subversion, an attitude we embrace here as bearing the stamp of social remittance.

Towards the end of the first chapter of the novel, however, there are indications of a progress in his conceptual capacity, albeit only limited to demystifying his own stereotypes about educated women and white people. Before this, as we have explored while focusing on Odenigbo’s status as an Americanah at the beginning of this chapter, Ugwu’s capacity to distinguish social patterns in his environment has grown and realizes his special status as a houseboy relative to the other houseboy in the neighbourhood. By the time Odenigbo’s friends come for the first time in his presence, he is capable of questioning his own prejudices and stereotypes, but a questioning that delineates Rimmon-Kenan’s perceptual facet of



focalisation. We attribute this growth to the habit he has developed of eavesdropping on Odenigbo's conversation with his friends, particularly paying attention to the voice of Odenigbo while manifesting dislike for any of the friends who opposes him. Though he has a particular dislike for Miss Adebayo she "was nothing like [he] had expected a university woman to be" (HYS 19). His expectation was that "university woman" ate "eggs that were not cooked well", wore wigs to hide baldness, straightened their hair so as "to look like white people", and "were not delicate stalks of grass" (HYS 19). As for Miss Adebayo he is convinced that she is too loud in the way she expresses herself and is particularly unimpressed whenever she contradicts Odenigbo or Olanna. He fantasizes about making a rude gesture at her: "he fantasized about sticking out his tongue at Miss Adebayo and saying, 'You cannot speak English like madam, so shut your dirty mouth'" (HYS 85). As further measure of extreme dislike for her he restrains himself from "the urge to raise his own voice from behind the kitchen door and tell her to shut up, especially when she called Master a sophist. He did not know what *sophist* meant, but he did not like that she called Master that" (HYS 19–20 italics in the original). Of white people, his prejudicial notion that "grass-coloured eyes" as Professor Lehman's, were evil is put to question with his first-hand encounter with the professor (HYS 18). Throughout both parts of the novel marked "The Early Sixties" (Parts one and three), this is the characteristic focalisation facet pertaining to Ugwu's way of seeing which though peaking with nascent questioning, still lack the discerning attitude that can be held up as values he incorporates from Odenigbo and Olanna as settled returnee migrants. But the most salient pattern he displays is his purposeful eavesdropping on conversations Odenigbo has with his friends, in most cases stationing himself in the kitchen where he is within earshot of the conversation. Throughout his keen attention is felt in the narrative as a lurking presence, deliberately foregrounding its listening processes, changing listening positions, finding pretexts to be in the living room where the heated debate is (see HYS 17, 20, 86, 124–26).

From listening in he is able to note each speaker's position in argument relative to the couple's (Odenigbo and Olanna). Together with the evident calculative mental exercise, these alignments in argument patterns begin to have a nebulous sense of ideological content in the conversations which he has been assiduously attending to. This acuity becomes more salient in parts two and four of the narrative (both marked Late Sixties). Part two marks the start of Biafra crisis, propitiously also acting as an event that scrambles together Ugwu's formative intellectual faculties nurtured through eavesdropping on Odenigbo and Olanna and their regular guests. Bugeja's notion of memorial-

historical dialectic that explains the productiveness of liminality in the moment of here and now is pertinent in accounting for this emergence of Ugwu's faculties. As described in the last chapter the memorial-historical dialectic results from the relation between erratic memory, in the time of here and now, as it impacts on and as it is impacted upon by material founding realities. Ugwu's apprehension of the situation about him outlines a liminal moment as "the workings of discursive elements and structures of feeling" (Bugeja, 'Reincorporative Trajectories' 13) in the here and now, acting on and as it is acted upon by the political, social and ideological persuasions gleaned from the seminal insertion into Odenigbo-Olanna influence axis. In this liminal moment his apprehension of the situation around him in ethical terms is "not yet concept ... part analysis" (Bhabha 181) and henceforth adopts a brooding attitude towards the problematics of the situation. It is because of this reason of liminal interrogativeness that his profiling of Odenigbo's friends undergoes a radical turn. Adebayo's discountenanced bold figure becomes a welcome relief in his craving for nuanced information about the unfolding political situation in Nigeria. For the first time, he embraces Adebayo's contradiction of Odenigbo's opinions:

'Too much rhetoric, Odenigbo,' Miss Adebayo said. 'You can't make a case for the military.' Ugwu felt better; this was the sparring he was used to.  
 'Of course I can. With a man like Major Nzeogwu, I can,' Master said. 'Ugwu! More ice!' 'The man is a communist.' Professor Lehman insisted. His nasal voice annoyed Ugwu, or perhaps it was simply that Professor Lehman had the same fair hair as Mr Richard but none of the quiet dignity. (*HYS* 126)

From way he re-distributes his attitude, there is strong evidence suggesting an alignment with Odenigbo's earlier doctrinaire advocacy for an anti-imperial and nationalistic ethic. The figure of the white man represented in Professor Lehman, offering upsetting criticism is now unlikeable, albeit in perceptual terms rather than on distinct ethical and ideological terms. Indicating the utility of Bhabha's conception of liminality cited above, Ugwu's attitudinal stance makes it evident that though he has a nebulous idea of the ethical and ideological constraints in play, this has not yet crystallised into a distinct concept but is in part analytic groping for this conceptual essence. His present mental scheme, what Bugeja terms "discursive elements and structures of feeling" ('Reincorporative Trajectories' 13), is thus recapitulative of Odenigbo's doctrinairism. This claim is reinforced by the fact that we can trace this re-alignment in Ugwu's attitude to the horizon-shaping Odenigbo-Olanna axis in the narrative's Nsukka of early sixties. As pointed out earlier Ugwu's listening in during heated arguments at the gathering of Odenigbo's Nsukka friends is crucial in constituting Ugwu's present structures of feeling, to use

Bugeja's phrase. Even though he reveals he never precisely comprehended the merits of the arguments, nonetheless he gives the impression he got their drift:

Nor did he entirely understand the conversation of Master and his friends but listened anyway and heard that the world had to do more about the black people killed in Sharpeville, that the spy plane shot down in Russia served the Americans right, that De Gaulle was being clumsy in Algeria, that the United Nations would never get rid of Tshombe in Katanga .... "To that brave black American led into the University of Mississippi! 'to Ceylon and to the world's first woman prime minister! 'To Cuba for beating the Americans at their own game!' – and Ugwu would enjoy the clink of beer bottles against glasses .... (HYS 17–18)

Regardless of density of the conversations, he could make out the outlines of the problems involved, namely that Americans are perhaps not doing something right despite or by virtue of their global command of power, or that the French are not doing something right in Algeria, and that black people, and women are subjected to some oppression and injustice. Later dislike for Professor Lehman in the "Late Sixties" (Part 3, quoted above) can thus be seen as an assumption of Odenigbo's ethical stance with regards to America's global power play, but on a micro-scale of Lehman's personal character. To show that these critical ethical questions are formative of his attitude and really matter to him, he is given to enacting the role of Odenigbo at nights after a day of particularly heated contestation, a strong evidence of how invaluable Odenigbo's role is in shaping Ugwu's thought patterns. I contend that the full significance of Ugwu's awakening, courtesy of Odenigbo and Olanna, would become more palpable, after the tragic culmination of the Biafra war, through his exercise of memorialising it. I aver that the spectral distribution of his metatextual book "The Book: The World was Silent When We Died" throughout the narrative in *HYS* mimics the distribution of his rapt consciousness especially with a view to committing himself to the ethical postures of Olanna and Odenigbo whom he venerates.

To conclude the argument in this section, it was reiterated at the start that Olanna presents the image of Americanah as a trope for the radical returning migrant, an agent midwifed through a location in-between discourses of power, with Nigeria's bourgeois hegemony on one side and the imaged "white people's *weltanschauung* she is supposed to have imbibed in migrant itineraries, on the other." On Bhabha's premises, the previous chapter argued that such a disturbance of the sense of identity plenitude, in terms of class and ethnicity, galvanizes a political desire whose objective is to re-fashion and re-configure the prevalent determining order. In this section it was outlined that Olanna's migrant background has engendered in her that political impetus to derail normativity of bourgeois pretensions. It now remains to praxeologically explore this political desire. This is a task earmarked for the next

section where it will be demonstrated how Olanna's attitudinal orientations explored above are operative in her social engagements in the world cast in narrative.

### **From political desire to praxis: aspects, ramifications and prospects of social remittance**

In this section, aspects of the focalising characters' practices with provenance in (though not limited to) the attitudinal bearings examined above, which set them against the communities they return to as Americanah, are identified. In tandem with this identification, discursive ramifications of these focal characters' interventional practices within their social milieu, and the prospects that these practices implicate for societies cast in the narratives, are investigated.

Starting with *Americanah*, the archetypal Lagos woman cut in Ifemelu's old friends enmeshed in vanities of womanly life in Lagos, defined by materialistic shrewdness, ostentatiousness, obsession with marital bliss and glitz, concretize through Ifemelu's consciousness in a manner that configures a wicked and disreputable society. In its discursive relation with other social vectors, such as political establishment and bourgeois ego trip, this woman figure portrays a degenerate society where virtually everyone is guilty of this degeneracy, because of these figures' visibility and influence. If this decadence has festered to a degree it can be perceived by sense of smell or through somatic means, as this is evident in the narrative, then this is to gesture at its extensive pervasiveness within the social fabric, a normativity streamlined by patriarchal, bourgeois and political formation in place. For an Americanah as Ifemelu, however, this normalised degeneracy stands out glaring from an in-between location in which she is situated because of the critical productiveness of displacement. The driving political desire that informed the quest to undermine normalised or invisible racism in America is called into use on return to Lagos, albeit vernacularized or translated into destabilising a new set of societal transparencies, a similar act of sly civility trained on an objective that is restorative.

Towards this end she establishes the blog *The Small Redemptions of Lagos* a medium from which she intends to re-claim the story of Lagos and by extension, that of the Nigerian nation. She is already aware, while in America as she prepares to return to Nigeria, that her motherland's image is anything but estimable. Fellow African migrants express their dislike for Nigeria because of certain narratives they have come to embrace as definitive of her country. Kelsey, Mariama's South African customer at her

salon is unbridled in announcing to everyone why she is biased about Nigerian films: “In my country, South Africa, Nigerians are known for stealing credit cards and doing drugs and all kinds of crazy stuff. I guess the films are kind of like that too” (*Americanah* 187). Mariama and Halima, both Malians, each make a bold indication of their dislike for Nigerians. To Halima Nigeria is the “[w]orst corrupt country in Africa”, whereas to Mariama Nigerians are defined by the bad things they do, including robbery with violence (*Americanah* 187). Through Laura, Ifemelu is also already aware of American imaginations of Africa and Africans (Nigeria and Nigerians inclusive) as necessarily poverty-strapped (see *Americanah* 147, 162-63, 167-68). These impressions of Nigeria’s maligned image, both locally and abroad, enter the matrix of the interventional engagements of her return.

As a countermeasure, she is resolute about what she intends to embark on in re-storying her nation: “I have big plans for it [the blog]. I’d like to travel through Nigeria and post dispatches from each state, with pictures and human stories ...” (*Americanah* 436). It is clear that she does not indiscriminately distribute guilt but implies that Nigeria’s collective narrative has been hijacked or superseded by narratives of a limited sector of Nigerian society, ranging from politicians, to socialites and those well-connected to the state. As well, it is her resolve not to centre those indices orienting towards state’s failure in its role, though this may need urgent attention, but she is conscious of the pitfalls of overemphasizing this. Therefore, as an exercise in re-centering alternative but silenced narratives, in the blog she expects to feature “[n]othing familiar, not a traffic clog of yellow rusted buses or a waterlogged slum of zinc shacks” (*Americanah* 417) all of which by being the familiar have lent definitive identity to Lagos. Essentially this suggests that Lagos is defined by narratives of neglect, disorder and abject poverty represented by “traffic clog of yellow rusted buses” and “waterlogged slum of zinc shacks”. Even genuine stories of human struggle for survival and human necessities have been hijacked by the wealthy in a bid to eke out their egocentric motives of furthering their charitable image. Auntie Onenu’s *Zoe* magazine particularly comes to her as having submitted to this selfish motive of the wealthy as it “always featured a wealthy person, hugging children at a motherless babies’ home, with bags of rice and tins of powdered milk propped in the background” (*Americanah* 417). A countermove, therefore, is to retrace Nigeria’s story from diverse locations and contexts of the country through picture narratives and first-hand stories of what can aptly be referred to as the man in the street, if only to give such Nigerians a voice. Symbolic of the reclamation in narrative, it shows in the choice of her own “dreamy photograph of an abandoned colonial house” (*Americanah* 421) with a resident peacock, as her blog’s

masthead. Though the house symbolically embodies colonial subjugation, but also in it is the affirmation of Nigeria's history, especially of emergence from this subjugation. The symbol, however, insinuates that the gem (represented by the male peacock) of Nigeria's narrative as a nation resides in its promising beginnings as are public, but which has been selfishly subverted by the military and political class (represented by Chief Okonji in *HYS* and The General in *Americanah*) and cartels (represented by Chief Ozobia in *HYS* and Tunde Razaq's father in *Americanah*) thriving on exploiting close relations with custodians of public interest.

Her first major snapshot of Lagos is a reflexive story about returnees' hypocrisies, specifically targeting the voguish air of returnees and the pitfalls of re-integration into Nigerian society (*Americanah* 421). This post derives from her attendance of the Nigeropolitan (a clique of Nigeria returnee migrants) meeting while still working at *Zoe* and acts as a call for the returnees' re-adaptation to Nigerian realities. The social remittance angle of this call is that in effect Ifemelu is advocating for the cultivation of pride in their city, Lagos, and in the country as whole. True to her intentions to reorient the narrative of Nigeria's nationhood and the values it subscribes to, this post stirs a debate among commentators about the recognition of Nigerian cities' national identity rather than denigrating them in its differential relation with metropolitan cities like New York. This post may not directly target the non-migrant Nigerians but considering the pressing need to redeem Nigeria's narrative, it is invaluable that returnees themselves, understood to have returned with "dreams in their pockets and a hunger to change the country" (*Americanah* 421), get it right or else this narrative becomes entangled and derailed in processes where alien tastes are injected into it. The call to returnees is thus a call to graft a Nigerian perspective that embraces the national identity, while recognizing the urgent need to reconstruct this identity. Whereas this wake-up call resonates with some of her readers, there are those expressing cynicism (one commenter posts: "*Rubbish post. Who cares?*" (*Americanah* 421 italics in the original)), a reminder of the daunting task for those returnees, like Ifemelu, engaging in well-meant commitments to re-engineer the narrative of their country. But there is hope that this plea is stirring many from their silence. The majority of those who post responses affirmatively indicate their discontent with some of the returnees' sense of alienation and are ready to stand up to their "arrogance", and thus a sign that their attitudes have been impacted upon through Ifemelu's cyberspace that Ifemelu has grafted. To this effect, three comments from the blog are sampled in the narrative:

The first commenter wrote: *Rubbish post. Who cares?* The second one wrote: *Thank God somebody is finally talking about this, Na wa for arrogance of Nigerian returnees. My cousin came back after six years in America and the other morning she came with me to the nursery school at Unilag where I was dropping off my niece and, near the gate, she saw students standing in line for the bus and she said, "Wow, people actually stand in line here!"* Another early commenter wrote: *Why should Nigerians who school abroad have a choice of where to get posted for their national youth service? Nigerians who school in Nigeria are randomly posted so why shouldn't Nigerians who school abroad be treated the same way?* That comment sparked more responses than the original post had. By the sixth day, the blog had one thousand more unique visitors. (*Americanah* 421-22 italics in the original)

The second commenter captures the returnee cousin's note of surprise in seeing orderliness amongst students lining up to enter the bus in a bid to show that returning migrants' mind-sets are structured by the same stereotypical narratives about Nigeria and Nigerians being supposedly prone to disorderliness. The third comment sampled has a far-reaching implication as it reaches deep into the bases of Nigeria's social inequality. As it is clear from *HYS* and *Americanah*, it is mostly the rich and those with better established social capital (such as the Ozobias, Auntie Uju through The General, Kayode and Ginika) who have opportunity to school abroad. This implies it is this same class that is always getting favourable treatment as the commenter's concern indicates. However, this tendency at least is now being put to question through this space Ifemelu has facilitated through the cyberspace. It is symbolic that this note of protest "sparked more responses than the original post had" suggesting that Ifemelu's small gesture is having a ripple effect as the problematization and conversation about the underlying rationale for unfair posting procedures begin to take a life of its own. The implication that this has on the bigger picture is that inasmuch as those who school abroad are mostly middle class, the questioning of posting considerations carry the implication that fundamental questions must ultimately be asked of the class hierarchy in Nigerian society. This is what Levitt and Lamba-Nieves refer to as scaling out (20; 'A Transnational Gaze' 36), where values, attitudes, and practices pertaining to one domain spread out to other social domains. In this case there is the contemplated scale-out of questions of inequality in education sphere into bigger questions of class hierarchy in the wider society.

The most radical and the most far-reaching of Ifemelu's work of social remittance, through blogging, is her bold exposé on the dubious luxury life of Lagos's young women. The social remittance content perspective of this intervention lies in what Kristeva has pointed out as one's unceasing confrontation with the abject within a discursive formation (*Powers of Horror* 6). Ifemelu's abject of man-dependent woman, which as it was demonstrated in the previous chapter, derive from the Bugejan interrogative, memorial-historical dialectic implicating the life of her aunt, Uju, and the vicissitude of the traumatic



sexual barter with the tennis coach that in Kristevan sense, crystallizes the impetus to resist and destabilize women's dependency on men under patriarchal imperatives. In her own life, this driving force is evident in the aggressive reaction she has when, after re-uniting with Obinze upon her return to Nigeria, the latter makes a remote suggestion that he could offer financial aid to grow her Nigeria blog, *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*. Her reaction is fierce and instinctive:

"Your blog already has such a following," he said.

"I have big plans for it .... but I have to do things slowly first, establish it, make some money from advertising."

"You need investors."

"I don't want your money," she said, a little sharply, keeping her eyes levelly on the sunken roof of the abandoned house. She was irritated by his comment about intelligent person because it was, it had to be, about his wife, and she wanted to ask why he was telling her that.

(*Americanah* 436)

Sudden flare of temper is clearly a reaction to Obinze's offer to partner with her as an "investor", an offer that in her eyes insinuates an objective to patronize her as man, which stirs deep within her the now ingrained instinct of resistance against a view of men "as sources of things" (*Americanah* 396). Her overt admission that she is infuriated by Obinze's preceding remark that "It's just refreshing to have an intelligent person to talk to", as he feels about her, comes off as an instinctive ruse in this context.<sup>66</sup> Another more coherent way of accounting for this sudden show of hostility is the prospect where Obinze, a married man, is entangled with her indeed as an investor but one shrouded in romantic relation. This would implicate her in the same reproachable trap she castigates where "[e]very attractive young woman" (*Americanah* 454) is assumed to be thriving on some man's wealth, or still where she sustains such a relationship in the same way Auntie Uju lived as The General's concubine. Earlier on, we examined that while in a conversation with Ranyinudo, she finds it inconceivable that a woman could be bound to a man just to insure her economic and social security: "Ifemelu shook her head. Ranyinudo, for whom men existed only as sources of things. She could not imagine calling Obinze to ask him for reduced rent in one of his properties" (*Americanah* 395). Her firm belief in economic independence as a woman, contrasting with those of her non-mobile friends, thus stands out as a new value growing out of "the transnational as the translational" (Bhabha 173) functioning in her Nigerian context as social remittance.

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<sup>66</sup> In another instance her reaction of repulsion against Ranyinudo's open materialism is immediately displaced to "unpretty Lagos" (see *Americanah* 387).

As pointed out above, Ifemelu's assault on parasitic Lagos women is a bold unmasking of such women's precarious agency because this is done with full knowledge that it has a direct implication on her relationship with her close friends, described earlier, thus begging the question of her own personal interest: what happens when returning migrants have to make daring decisions that may disrupt her relationship with those close to them? Though such intrepid acts, as in the case of the post, are presented tactfully as light-hearted observation, they carry the risk that well-meaning returnees as Ifemelu face ostracism because of perceived superciliousness and thus attract the same criticism as those returnees she condemns in the same blog. Given the entrenched culture of women's dependence on men to obtain a wealth profile, where (in words attributed to Ifemelu's figural consciousness) "[e]very attractive woman ... became mysteriously suspect" (*Americanah* 454), Ifemelu risks being seen as a meddling outsider within the entrenched normativity of patriarchal order. Responding to the post, her close friend, Ranyinudo, who sees a reflection of herself in it, is furious that Ifemelu feels "so superior" in disparaging them (*Americanah* 423). As far as Ranyinudo is concerned, it is a foregone knowledge that a woman's means can only be achieved and accounted for in relation to a man. As we have argued above, if Ranyinudo has been used as an embodiment of parasitic and materialistic Lagosian woman, then this worldview she espouses elevates into a synecdoche in which a slice of Lagosian woman's outlook is proffered. However, keeping this in mind, such women's generalisations that dependence on man is a given truth is debunked in Ranyinudo's petulant offensive against Ifemelu's supposed personal humiliation through her blog:

"And who are you to pass judgement? How is it different from you and the rich white guy in America? Would you have your US citizenship today if not for him? How did you get your job in America? You need to stop this nonsense." (*Americanah* 423)

From our position as readers, Ranyinudo's counterassault on Ifemelu's insurgent act of disrupting a patriarchal norm, rings absurd since a great deal of Ifemelu's achievement is as a result of her own struggle's legacy. Ifemelu reveals that she got her American citizenship through her employer as a corporate entity rather than as a patriarchal one (see *Americanah* 363). Likewise, contrary to Ranyinudo's normative values, Ifemelu establishes her life-changing blog in America on a suggestion from a fellow woman, Wambui (see *Americanah* 295–96). Evidently also she gets her first formal employment in public relations (where she gets her Green Card) because of her aptitude and less because of the effort of her white American partner in romance, Curt. Even though she gets the job

courtesy of Curt's social network, the latter makes it obvious to us that he leaves the critical part of the interview for Ifemelu: "All you need to do is ace the interview and it's yours" (*Americanah* 202). This is a clear indication that Ifemelu deservedly gets the employment as opposed to Ranyinudo's *idée fixe* pertaining to woman's opportunity in the society. This goes to prove Levitt's observation that the impact of social remittance is determined, among other factors, by the attributes of the target audience (*The Transnational Villagers* 67). However, contrary to her belief that unmarried women are more flexible in adopting new ideas (*The Transnational Villagers* 67), the figure of Ranyinudo represents a different pattern in terms of reception and impact of social remittance. Possibly, the economic empowerment of the women may offer a way out for further self-empowerment in other spheres of social life, because as it is clear from the narrative that women resort to men as means to economic security.

On the other hand, without foreclosing other possible readings as far as intentional focus of *HYS* as narrative discourse, the paratextual data, particularly from the author herself, offer compelling cues, of that Genette terms as the threshold "which offers ... the possibility either of entering [the world of the text] or of [retrospective] turning back [to the world presented in the text]" ('Introduction to the Paratext' 261). With respect to what we are required to make of the story in *HYS*, the call to always keep the memory of Biafra is strategically unequivocal. On one hand it works as recapitulation of what is argued here as intentional focus of the narrative, embodied in the function of Ugwu's book as a venerable work of Biafra catastrophe memorialisation. Coming as an exhortatory cadential end to her acknowledgement of persons significant in shaping her writing of *HYS*, it immediately harks back to these highlighted persons (victims, survivors or their direct descendants, scholars and witnesses of the war, and those involved in production of *HYS* text) as an encouragement to them, as victims, survivors and descendants, to always advance this memory. On the other hand, being a one-liner paragraph, and thus necessarily set aside, its address steps out of the purview of those mentioned as victims, survivors or their descendants, to offer on the side, an amnesty to those indicted as guilty of silence in the face of Biafra atrocities, synecdochically referred to as "the world" in Ugwu's book, (presuming that there is feedback of remorse in the hypothetical addressee).<sup>67</sup> This amnesty, however, is in exchange of

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<sup>67</sup>Two world powers, Britain and Russia, were directly involved in Biafra atrocities as they offered military aid, including in blockading Biafra, in effect using hunger as war weapon leading to starvation resulting in millions of deaths (see Makokha 113). The "world" may thus be taken to include not only Russia and Britain but also other nations which had significant influence but did not undertake any initiatives in terms of humanitarian aid.

acceptance of guilt and atoning for it through memory and memorialisation. For in the pragmatics of intoning “may we always remember” is a connotation of capitulation in condemnation with a tandem consensus to advance the memory. If the world, addressed in the third person, was seen as apathetic of atrocity, it is now forms part of a collective “we” with a shared interest of furthering the narrative of the ugliness of war. On the other side, assuming “the world” in question is obstinately indifferent, this intoning serves the sarcastic function of aggravating the guilt that narrative discourse in *HYS* provokes. Against this background, the work of remembering the foulness of war requires a cultivation of capacity identified here as a cautiously choreographed process in transmission of social remittance.

Other than Olanna’s economic independence, she has also returned with a bold stance against the hegemonic patriarchal claim of a woman’s body by firmly rejecting the norm that a woman’s body and economic commodities are fungible. She does this by turning down sexual advances of the minister for finance, who with the help of her parents, have conspired to trade her sexually in exchange for a government contract for her parents. Considering the norm where (like the case of Anulika and Eberechi) women and girls cede the right over their bodies, be it in legitimate social practices as marriage or in illegitimate ones as sexual trafficking, parents have arrogated themselves such rights. This pro-woman attitude is also evident in her affirmative resolution to keep Amala’s baby who because she is born a girl, is rejected by both her mother and grandmother.

## Conclusion

This chapter set out to demonstrate the agentic role of returning migrants within communal set ups in their home societies. Their agency was seen as premised on the fact that the migrant characters who also happened to be focalising agents in the narratives examined, had experiences abroad which had far-reaching implication on the normative values and practices that determined their worldview before emigration. For *Americanah*, this premises were drawn from arguments presented in previous chapter and were expanded upon in this chapter in order to show that Ifemelu engages in interventional practices deliberately meant to alter values and norms of women and of Nigerians in general particular concerning the fashioning of new narrative and projecting sanctionable image of Nigerian identity. With respect to *HYS* a similar task of attributing radical agency to migration experience was undertaken though the premises in support of this attribution were extrapolated from the secondary data presenting

through social, political and ideological postures of the focalising characters, namely Olanna, Odenigbo and Ugwu. It was shown that the latter, as a non-migrant, in his life-course developed an ethical stance that distinctly reflect those of Olanna and Odenogbo, thus affirming the assertion that returning migrants are influential in terms of the nature of social attributes they return to their home communities with.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

With a view to consolidating the central arguments proffered in the preceding chapters, a recapitulation of the orienting aims will suffice. First, the dissertation sought to place Adichie's narratives within the context of migrant transnationalism which has been shown to carry significant implications for social structures within both migrants' country of origin and their destination contexts. These implications arise from the view that such migrants are not only conduits for new values adopted in destination contexts, but are also veritable agents exploiting their threshold transnational locations to synthesize new outlooks. Secondly, and proceeding from the premise of the first purpose, it sought to delineate the social structures that undergird values, ideas and practices in the depicted migrant characters' communities of origin in Nigeria. This aim of demarcating normative structures and systems of practice presented as prevalent where the migrant characters originate in their migrant courses, was for the purpose of establishing both what informs the characters' frame of mind on departure and targets as well as determinants of what they subsequently socially remit. Thirdly, the aim was to account for the processes by which the depicted focalising characters, in their transnational locations as *limen*, instinctively exploit their liminal states in re-orienting their outlooks, both about the normative structures and systems of practice they acquired in the home country, and about those in the adopted homeland, the United States. Fourthly, it sought to demonstrate that characters in such transnational locations become radical subjects within the social structure of their home country on return migration, verifying the operation of social remittance processes.

With respect to the first aim, chapter two illustrated that Adichie's work emerge from a context overdetermined by intense cross-border mobilities that have reconfigured the way social process particularly "from below" (as opposed to those "from above" such as business conglomerates and government entities) have been understood (Guarnizo and Smith 3). Because of its ample generic affordance *Americanah* reveals more intricately the subtleties and processes that generate and nourish transnational formations. It was shown that familial culture and norms and dynamics conduce in establishment of a chain of mobilities that spill over national borders, but also that personally nurtured friendships, in a context where the culture of migration is pervasive, are vital functions in facilitating cross-border mobilities. The narrative in *Americanah* thus verifies Adichie's pre-occupation with character locations, social relationships and processes that problematize the boundedness of national

territorial spaces and processes. Further to this, as part of the operationalisation of transnational formation, the novel protagonist, Ifemelu, dovetails into the American social and communal matrix through her entry into a romantic relationship with native Americans and through socio-political contestation, establishing herself a legitimate space as an African migrant. Through romantic relations, she finds an entry point into American society, within which she engages in the destabilisation of normalised hierarchical race relations, and thus socio-politically entrenching herself within American society. This embedding within American society via its politics strengthens even further as she gets American citizenship, enabling her to have a dual national belonging, simultaneously as Nigerian and as American, and an even multiple border-spanning identity as a black person who has to contend with the West's denigratory attitude towards all black people. On the other hand, through the critical appraisal of three short stories ('Imitation', 'The Arrangers of Marriage' and 'Tomorrow is Too Far') a specificity of transnationalism was demarcated in the familial structure and associated marital practices. Apart from projecting transnationally dispersed familial structures, these texts isolate the gendered dimension of transnationalism as focal characters exploit the differential gender dynamics of 'here' and 'there'. However, these same texts reiterate the potential drawbacks associated with this transnational dispersal of family members and gender appropriation of transnational space especially with familial and marital practices in view.

As pertains the second aim of this inquiry, the interrogation of the focal stances in two narratives, *Hibiscus* and 'The American Embassy' shed light on the socio-political values, ideas and attitudes prevalent in Nigeria and which are motifically treated by Adichie in her oeuvre. *Hibiscus* highlighted these through the eyes of a pubescent girl, who is thus going through a liminal phase in her own life, where these normative structures become defamiliarised and were thus rendered more critically graspable. Essentially, the normative structures identified here relate to the inherent structures of power relations that constrain the focalising characters' universe particularised in the represented familial sphere. It was shown that this familial setting, together with inherent disciplinary practices, is exploited for analogic potential to reify those characterising the state's relation to its subjects, which Mbembe terms *commandement*. As a detail of this *commandement* 'The American Embassy' contemplates, through the mental anatomy of the traumatized, oppressive operation of autocratic regime, one of Adichie *idée fixe* that is revisited as a theme-and-variation in *Americanah* and *HYS*. However, *Hibiscus* demonstrates that repressive practices are not only limited to the use of physical violence as a means



of instituting subjecthood, but also that there are discursive practices which operate towards the same end of subjection. The novel identifies this discursive disciplinary mechanism primarily as patriarchy that keeps focalised characters (such as the focaliser, Kambili's mother, Beatrice) straitjacketed into their subject position. As asserted in chapter three, *Hibiscus* elucidates the social and political characteristics that inform the Nigerian communal and national contexts as departure points for transmigrants in later narratives of migration, especially *Americanah*, and those of return migration as in *HYS*. This exploration of *Hibiscus* and 'The American Embassy' arose from the rationale that the compulsion to socially remit is a logical result of immanent socio-political deficiencies or excesses at migrating characters' Nigerian origins that makes engagements on return migration, or from across the border, more pressing.

Proceeding from the delineated transnational contours and presented social values, ideas and practices in chapter two and three, respectively, the fourth and fifth chapters presented the dissertation's core arguments. Chapter four scrutinized *Americanah*'s focalising protagonists in dislocated positions (that implicate socio-psychological process evoking trauma of displacement) as they experience fragmentation in identification occasioned by physical detachment but enduring influence from the Nigerian homeland identification system and entry into the physical materiality of the new one of the adopted homeland. This fragmentation was seen to be productive of conjuncture within the identification locus. In the chapter this conjunctural moment was seized upon as the critical catachrestic moment of engagement with the Foucauldian regulatory regimes in Ifemelu's Nigerian homeland and in her new home, the United States. In effect this catachrestic location is built on the submission in chapter one that the transnational location is a productive liminal location where possibilities of socio-political innovation are broadened. It was argued that in this interstitial location both the familiar transparencies that structure the Nigerian homeland and the unfamiliar ones organising social relations in America are uncannily put into sharp relief, and which then makes their critique possible because of the objectifying function of the threshold location. One of the elements that was identified as crucial for the formation of radical subjectivity is trauma, both understood in the Freudian biological terms (for example as mental anguish resulting from Ifemelu sexual encounter with the tennis coach) or as a socio-cultural event resulting from displacement from physical materiality of one's semiotic order and immersion in an alien regulatory discourses. It was demonstrated that this engendered the political desire to destabilise such discursive disciplinary

regimes, both in Nigeria and in America. It was also argued that through a diversity of vectors, including personal character traits of Ifemelu as a protagonist, an antiracial stance crystalizes in Ifemelu as a critical function in the destabilisation of America's normalised racial attitudes representatively espoused by Laura. It was also argued that *Americanah* presents the value of liminal location as lodged in the dialectic between memory and the significant event of migration which entails physical uprooting from home and immersion in the adopted homeland. It was shown that this physical uprooting is not equivalent to erasure of the memory of the homeland, but that the uprooting is presented as a momentous event that provokes a reflection about the values embodied at the homeland. For the purpose of highlighting this claim, the dissertation illustrated, through the analysis of Ifemelu's mental topography and practices deriving from this mindset, that the transnational location as a *limen* facilitates the development of a radical subjectivity that presents in different forms such as sly civility, calculativeness and interrogativeness. Ifemelu's work of blogging while still in America provided a strong indication of agency evolved from the unique socio-political dynamics of a foreign country and which she deploys in the act that Bhabha aptly terms sly civility and calculativeness.

It was shown that same operative discursive agency of sly civility in her American blog is the same one in the blog *Small Redemptions of Lagos* that she sets up when she returns to Nigeria specifically for her project of reclaiming Nigeria's narrative. In the vocabulary of migrant adaptation, sly civility, calculativeness and interrogativeness pass for modes of adaptation to hostile but surmountable cross-border settings. Chapter five demonstrated that for a migrant, as Ifemelu, the need for adaptation and re-adaptation is a constant necessity. This is attested to by her need to re-orient herself with a Lagos that has also experienced major transformations. With Nigeria homeland in context this necessity for re-adaptation was shown as necessarily a process in social remittance, a work of socio-cultural translation. In the course of this re-adaptation, Foucauldian familiar transparencies by which gender inequality in Nigeria is produced are vividly visible to an interstitially located Ifemelu. From such a location, Lagos women's materialistic plots are rendered absurd and parochial, thus revealing to us Ifemelu's contrasting attitudes and values (as a returnee) pertaining to woman's choices (or lack of this) in Nigeria. To this focal character, Nigeria requires an unparalleled liberation from patriarchal subjection that has worked to constrict women's life choices to marriage. Similarly, chapter five seized upon the eponymous figure of the Americanah around which the narrative revolves in *Americanah*, to

highlight the presentation of similar figures in *HYS*. The scrutiny of Olanna and Odenigbo showed that we can more fully understand their roles in the narrative if we take into consideration the fact that they are returning migrants. The two figures were shown to espouse an ideological slant that is disruptive of the prevalent social stratification in Nigeria that *HYS* presents. This was attributed to their migration histories. Whereas critical caution was exercised in incorporating Odenigbo into this rubric of *Americanah*, it was also appreciated that his radicality is an overdetermined attribute whose provenance lies in a multiplicity of factors, migration credentials being one of them. On the other hand, Olanna represents a more conscious status as a returnee migrant. Because of this she more transparently manifests attitudes and values that can be attributed to her history of dislocation. The most conspicuous of these attitudes and values relate to the personal tenets she holds pertaining to patriarchal appropriation of women's bodies, gender marginalisation and the social ideology that prioritizes respect for common human essence and egalitarianism. Whereas she is born and brought up in a bourgeois set up, she now espouses a different attitude towards this bourgeois life. She prefers what she perceives as less alienated and egalitarian, rustic communal life. It is this migration-related transformation in outlook that is transmitted to and imbibed by Ugwu who then subsequently becomes a key raconteur of Biafra catastrophe.

A major observation from the research is that social remittance is not automatically generated amongst all those individuals who move, nor are values of whatever nature (desirable or otherwise) automatically instilled in those characters in transnational locations. The analytic work on *Americanah* demonstrates that to socially remit is not a given function of the mere experience abroad. On the contrary, as the contrasting figures of Ifemelu and Uju corroborate, to be a social remitter an individual migrant ought in the first place to possess innate capacity, embodied before emigration, but which the is realized or operationalised by the unique socio-political and cultural dynamics abroad and within the transnational space. What is to be socially remitted does not grow from an empty slate that is an immigrant into which these contents of social remittance is written, but rather these take root within structures embodied from the point of origin.

While bringing *HYS* within purview of migration research, a gesture was made at the protagonist, Olanna's grappling with alienation as understood from Marxist perspective. As it was shown in the analyses of Adichie's works, this alienation is also determined by Nigeria's postcolonial realities.

Because Marxist significances were outside the scope of this dissertation, this idea of alienation was only alluded to in a limited manner so as to fulfil the objective of elucidating social remittance in *HYS*. This idea of alienation can also be extended to the rest of Adichie's texts where power relations can be fruitfully be approached from his Marxist perspective. It is here suggested that further research can be conducted in order to fully explore the relationship transnationalism and alienation within postcolonial political economy as these emerges in Adichie's oeuvre.

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